

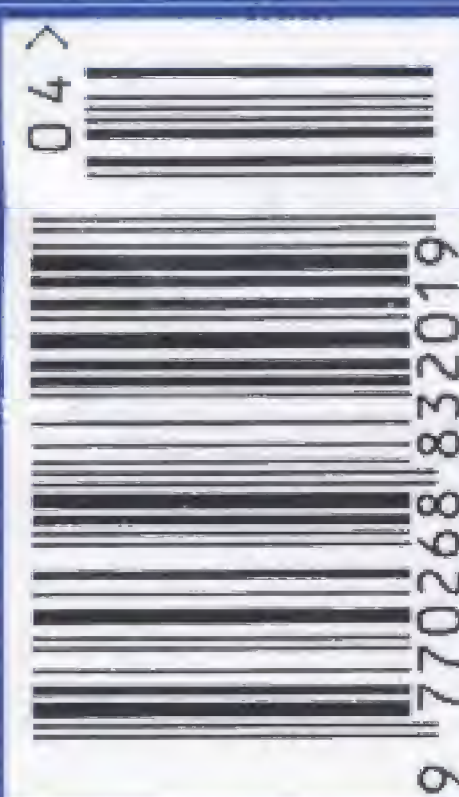
# MILITARY

## ILLUSTRATED PAST & PRESENT

No.59

APRIL 1993

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**INSIGNIA OF THE LEIBSTANDARTE**

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SHOWCASE**

**THE FIRST TANK BATTLE  
THE BREN MACHINE GUN  
GEOFFREY KEYES, VC**



# MILITARY ILLUSTRATED

□ PAST & PRESENT □

No. 59

ISSN 0268-8328

April 1993

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Our front cover illustration shows Richard Moore, military advisor on the new films 'Sharpe's Rifles' and 'Sharpe's Eagle' with members of the South Essex Group during filming. (See article page 15.)

Published monthly by  
MILITARY ILLUSTRATED LTD  
45 Museum Street, London WC1A 1LY  
(tel: 011-404-0504)

Editor:  
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Editorial design by  
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Konrad Kochanski  
45 Museum Street, London WC1A 1LY  
(tel: 011-404-0504)

Typesetting:  
PKS Ltd  
53a High Street Huntingdon  
Cambs PE18 6AQ  
(tel: 0480 414347)

Printed by:  
The Grange Press  
Butts Road  
Southwick  
West Sussex BN4 4EJ

UK newsagent distribution:  
United Magazines Distribution Ltd  
1 Bernell Rd, London N7 1AX  
(tel: 071 700-4600)

USA hobby trade:  
Bill Dean Books Ltd  
151-35 51st Avenue,  
Linden Hll, NY 1155

Canada:  
Vanguard Publishing Ltd.  
1 Northrup Cres., PO Box 2151 Stn. B  
St. Catharines, Ontario L2M 6P5

Australia & New Zealand:  
Gordon & Gotch Ltd  
25-37 Huntingdale Rd  
Burwood, Victoria 3125

South Africa:  
Intermag  
CNA Building, 12 Laub St.  
New Centre, Johannesburg

France & Belgium:  
Histoire & Collections  
19 Avenue de la Republique, 75011 Paris  
(tel: 45-57-83-83)  
Price: 5/1r, year's subscriptions: 350fr  
(France), 590fr (other EEC)

Italy:  
Tuttolibri, PO Box 595, 45100 Parma  
Price: L7 000, year's subscription L84,000

Denmark:  
Dansk Bladdistribution  
9 Ved Amergerbanen  
DK-2500 Copenhagen

Sweden:  
Plus Interpress  
Strandbergsgata 61 S-11289 Stockholm

Subscription service  
Military Illustrated,  
c/o Lowtherbond Ltd  
17 Bushby Avenue, Rustington,  
W. Sussex BN16 2BY  
(tel: 0903 775121)

Publisher's subscription rates for  
12 issues (one year): UK, £55,  
other European £50; by Airspeed USA,  
\$100 other non European, £60, all  
payments in sterling or US dollars

Military Illustrated Past & Present is  
published monthly by Military Illustrated Ltd  
The subscription price is \$100 for one year  
Mercury Airfreight International Ltd., 2325  
I-F Randolph Avenue, Avenel, NJ 07001  
(US Mailing Agent) Second class postage  
paid at Rahway, NJ, USA.

## FORT NELSON

The Royal Armouries Museum of Artillery, Fort Nelson, is reopening on 10 April with an exciting programme of events over the next six months. These include a demonstration of Roman siege artillery by the Ermine Street Guard on 25 April, a mediaeval day on 23 May, a display by the English Civil War Society on 6 June, Napoleonic artillery drill on 11 July, a World War II day on 1 August, the Fort Nelson Tournament featuring military bands, 'feats of arms' and field gun competition on 5 September and a military vehicle rally on 3 October. Fort Nelson is situated on Down End Road, Fareham, Hampshire, on Portsdown Hill off the M27, and is open most days from 10.30am to 4.30pm. Admission price is normally £2 (£1 concessions) or £3.50 (£1.75) on

## EDITOR'S NOTES

'firing days'. For further information telephone 0329 253734.

### 'OVERLORD 93'

The Solent Area of the Military Vehicle Trust will be holding a major rally over 29-31 May on Southsea Common, Portsmouth. Over 400 entries are expected and there will also be trade stalls and evening entertainment. Anyone wishing to take part, or requiring further information, should contact Chris Pearce on 0489 572582.

### 617 SQUADRON

McI Rolfe, features editor on the *Grantham Journal*, is anxious to make contact with anyone 'whose lives touched 617 Squadron at the

time of the Dambusters' raid'. The *Grantham Journal* has earned a good reputation over recent years for special wartime supplements of local interest, so if you can help McI, please write to him at 46 High Street, Grantham, Lincs NG31 6NE or telephone 0476 62291.

### BLITZ MUSEUM

A new museum opened recently allows visitors to 'relive' the actuality of life in London during the Blitz. The sights, sounds and smells of WWII are reconstructed through the Universal Studio-style special effects of a blitzed street, a journey in a 1940's lift to the London Underground and the fear of sitting in an Anderson Shelter

waiting for a VI's engine to cut out. You can also tune in to contemporary radio broadcasts, listen to a jukebox or watch a newsreel sitting on a bale of wartime blankets! The exhibits include posters, ration books and coupons, dozens of photographs and special sections on women at war and evacuees. Winston Churchill's Britain at War Theme Museum is situated in Tooley Street, London SE1, adjacent to London Bridge station, and is open daily (including Sundays) from 10am to 4.30pm. Visitors should note (completely coincidentally) that there is an antiques flea market in London Bridge station every Saturday with a strong emphasis on militaria — weapons, photos, books, badges, medals, etc.

Bruce Quarrie

### At the cinema

#### *Mediterraneo* (Mayfair Entertainment UK: 15)

The lighter aspects of war are the subject of Gabriele Salvatores' World War II comedy *Mediterraneo* (1991). It begins in 1941 as eight Italian soldiers disembark from a warship in order to occupy a small Aegean island which they have been ordered to

occupy for a few months. The island is seemingly deserted, but gralliti ominously warns that 'Greece is the tomb of the Italians'. Panic shooting at night results in the death of their pet donkey and the destruction of the radio, thus

severing all contact with the war and Italy.

The local inhabitants, once discovered, make them unexpectedly welcome: their young men have been taken away by the Germans. Lieutenant Montini (Claudio Bigagli) is encouraged by the priest to paint frescoes on the walls of his chapel, Sergeant Lo Russo (Diego Abatantuono) takes up dancing, the Munaron brothers (Memo Dini and Vasco Mirandola) desert their hilltop look-out point for the seductive charms of a shepherdess. All shed their uniforms and forget the war, until the arrival of a pilot informs them that Mussolini is dead. It is only a matter of time before their idyllic lifestyle will be interrupted by the arrival of the Allies.

This lightweight comedy, almost totally devoid of action, provides a reminder that for the fortunate few, war is not necessarily hell. The humour is subtler than Blake Edwards' comedy *What Did You Do in the War, Daddy?* (1966), about GIs occupying a Sicilian village, giving the film more of the atmosphere of a fantasy. Director Salvatores has dedicated the film to 'all those who are running away', intending to appeal to those attempting to escape today's reality, as well as those some fifty years before. The film was first shown in this country in the 1991 London Film Festival and won the 1992 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. It opens in London in April.

**Video releases to buy**  
*The Heroes* (Video Gems: PG)  
*The Heroes II: The Return* (Video Gems: PG)  
*Hunters of the Sky* (DD Distribution: E)

Diego Abatantuono as  
Sergeant Russo in  
*Mediterraneo*.

Among the most daring raids undertaken during the Second World War were attempts by members of Australia's Z Special Force to sabotage ships in Singapore Harbour. Operation *Jaywick* resulted in the sinking of seven ships, but Operation *Rimau* ended in disaster. These events are the subject of *The Heroes* (1989) and *Heroes II: The Return* (1991); two 3½-hour television mini-series produced by TVS and now available on two tapes. They are based on the book *The Heroes* by Ronald McKie.

*The Heroes* begins with English Captain Ivan Lyon (Paul Rhys) noticing an old Japanese fishing boat being used by Irish Paddy McDowell (Bill Kerr) to evacuate civilians from Singapore to Sumatra in 1942. He forces the possibility of using it to mount a raid against Singapore Harbour. Lyon has good reason to wreak revenge on the Japanese who have incarcerated his wife and child in Singapore's notorious Changi jail.

With the help of Captain Bob Page (Christopher Morsely) and Lieutenant Donald Davidson (John Bach) he picks a crew, led by Lieutenant Ted Carse (John Hargreaves), and a team of operatives who will paddle with limpet-mine laden canoes from an island base into the harbour. The fishing boat, now named the *Krait*, will transport the raiding party from their base at Cairns in North Queensland to an island base within striking distance of Singapore via the American naval base at Exmouth. The superstitious Lyon takes a cook to increase their complement to fourteen.

Much of the film is taken up with overcoming the objections of the high command, securing the necessary equipment, training, and mounting a trial raid on a 'friendly' harbour. The route from Exmouth takes them through the Lombok Strait by Bali to Singapore, a distance of some 2,000 miles. Under scrutiny from land, sea and air, they avoid detection by flying a



Japanese flag, colouring their skins brown and wearing traditional sarongs. The operatives are dropped at the island of Dongas, and paddle to Pandjang island from which the attack will be made. The raid is a complete success, but the return journey proves to be equally hazardous as the Japanese search for those responsible.

In *Heroes II: The Return* Lyon (now played by Nathaniel Parker) plans an even more spectacular raid using submersible boats. Lyon is to be accompanied by Page, Davidson and others from the original raid, along with newcomers totalling 73 in all. Davidson's wife Nancy (Anne Louise Lambert), who works in Intelligence, discovers their intentions. She and Roma Page (Miranda Otto) unsuccessfully attempt to dissuade their husbands from attempting a second mission.

As no suitable craft is available, the raiding party and their equipment are taken by the British submarine *Porpoise* to an area in which they can hi-jack a Chinese junk. This time their luck deserts them; they are discovered by a Malay patrol boat, forcing them to abandon the mission and destroy the junk. By hiding by day on islands, and paddling by night, they reach Merapas island, where they expect to be picked up by submarine.

The film flashes forward to after

the war. Captain Ellis (Simon Burke) is determined to discover what happened to the raiders. He interrogates Japanese prisoners known to have seen them. Eventually, with help from a Japanese civilian interpreter called Furuta (Ken Teraizumi) who befriended Page in prison, he pieces together what happened.

Ellis discovers that the raiding party was attacked on Merapas by a superior Japanese force, and forced to leave. Lyon and Davidson were killed. The captain of the submarine assigned to pick them up preferred to continue hunting enemy ships, thereby missing the all-important first rendezvous date. Page and ten others were eventually captured and imprisoned at Singapore.

The remainder of the film deals with their trial and execution, less than five weeks before the Japanese surrender. Ellis disbelieves the court transcript which claims their beheading was carried out in bushido ceremonial form by officers. On questioning, former guards admit it was carried out brutally and messily. The video briefly dramatises both versions, leaving the viewer to decide which is most accurate.

The two series are remarkably faithful to McKie's book but can be contrasted with Peter Maxwell's film *The Highest Honour* (1983),

which dealt with the same events. This was itself a re-edited version of *The Southern Cross* (Japanese title *Minami Jujisei*), a big-budget Australian/Japanese co-production based on the memoirs of Yuzuru Shinozaki, chief welfare officer in the Japanese civil administration of Singapore. This film emphasised the friendship between Page and a Cambridge-educated senior interpreter called Minoru Tamiya. It suggested that the prisoners' fate was the result of 'the highest honour' that Japanese military code could bestow on them and that Page requested that his friend Tamiya wield the sword that beheads him. This apparent whitewash of events cast only the dreaded Japanese Security police, the Kempeitai, as the villains.

Sharp-eyed viewers will note that the opening sequence of *The Return*, portraying the sinking of the ships in *Jaywick*, is actually taken from *The Highest Honour* rather than *The Heroes*, presumably because the more convincing special-effects were considered more likely to grab audience attention for the sequel!

*Hunters of the Sky: Fighter Aces of World War II* is a five volume set of documentaries dealing with World War II from the point of view of the fighter ace (here defined as five or more 'kills'). Volume 1, *The*

*Great Defenders* deals with the Battle of Britain, the German invasion of Russia and Pearl Harbor; *Hell in the Pacific* covers Chennault's Flying Tigers in China, and the battles of Midway and Guadalcanal. *Assault on Fortress Europe* deals with the bomber offensive on Germany and the events from North Africa to the fall of Berlin, while *Victory in the Pacific* deals with the island hopping campaign and ends with the atomic bomb. The final volume, *Struggle for Supremacy*, deals with technological developments of the fighter plane, and compares fighter aces.

Each volume lasts 50 or 70 minutes and features both combat footage, including a considerable amount shot from cameras, and interviews with aces. These include German (such as Adolph Galland), Russian and Japanese pilots, so often absent from this type of documentary. The tapes can be bought individually, or in a boxed set. The latter includes a short introductory tape, called *Knights of the Sky*, which is unavailable separately. The attractively designed sleeves feature paintings by well-known aviation artist Robert A. Taylor. The set is superior of its kind and is recommended for aviation buffs.

Stephen J. Greenhill

LONDON has been the central scene of sales of arms and armour for many, many years and Sotheby's and Christies have held some of the most famous auctions and were recognised as the prime movers in this field. There was the collection from Hever Castle, the American Renwick Collection, the Visser collection and the recent Dike collection, all held in London. Such sales gave the London market pride of place but the capital appears to be losing this prime position.

As predicted in last month's column, there were changes afoot at Sotheby's and these happened around Christmas. In addition to other changes and redundancies it was announced that with immediate effect this great auction house would hold no more sales of arms and armour in London. The entire department has been dispersed and all future sales will now take place at Summers Place in Billingshurst together with all sales of medals and sporting guns. There is one exception, and there will be a sale in April at the London Rooms of some very fine sporting and antique guns, all from one collection. The prestige sale of sporting guns held in the summer at Gleneagles in Scotland will continue. There will also be one Continental sale in Zurich and some sales in New York.

The move is probably based on the premise that the same amount of money that is generated in London with arms and armour sales can be generated at

Summers Place where costs are lower — therefore there will be a higher profit margin! Will it work that way? Time alone will tell but some are expressing doubts.

Many people feel, quite wrongly, that any auction outside London lacks prestige. Those in the trade and collectors know that this is not the case and a dealer or ardent collector will go to wherever he can find a bargain or some special object. No matter how true this is, the important fact is that many potential sellers have this mistaken idea and the question is will they go to an auction house that offers London sales in preference to one that does not? Many in the trade think they will and Christies, Philips and Bonhams may well reap the benefit of this move. Readers may remember that some time ago Christies moved their arms and armour sales to South Kensington but later returned them to King Street, which some dealers felt downgraded the sales. There is also the physical problem of getting to Summers Place which is much greater than popping in to view a collection when it was in London.

The effects of the move will become apparent when the first sale under the new regime is held on 5 April. The dates for the other planned sales are 28 July and 1 December. There will also be a Marine sale in July which will

include all manner of objects linked to the sea and sailors but this will be in London. Looking further ahead, there will be a specialist sale of aviation material later in the year.

Another point which has been made on more than one occasion is that when a change such as this is made there is adverse effect on the trade as a whole. Many will see it as a downgrading of the status of arms and armour and militaria. Despite this blow, arms and armour had a fairly rich time on the television at the beginning of February. In 'Value for Money', Michael Gambon, the well known actor, assisted by David Edge from the Wallace Collection, waxed lyrical about duelling pistols. Later in the month there was to have been a discussion on the proposed move of the Royal Armouries from London to Leeds. It is also known that a future episode of the antique dealer 'Lovejoy' will feature a Brown Bess musket. Events such as these can often stimulate the trade and auctioneers and dealers find an upsurge in enquiries following such programmes.

The Sotheby move is sad for many in the trade were beginning to think that there were signs of an improvement in the market. Sale results at Sotheby's seemed to bear this out and it was also reported that advisory days run by various auction houses seemed to be

better attended of late. I could be that we really are beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel (or is it just stars in our eyes?) There will be some indication when the Park Lane Fair has taken place. As most readers will know, this is a rather prestigious affair attracting a small but generally discriminating attendance.

The Victorian Military Society held its annual show on Saturday, 30 January, and as always the small hall was crowded with dealers offering medals, prints, books, model soldiers and some collectors' items. Among the crowds of visitors moved fine examples of the Victorian soldier in appropriate uniforms and there was a magnificent Russian as well as one or two ladies in appropriate dress. All helped to make this event as enjoyable as ever.

There seems to be little really exciting in the near future although Wallis and Wallis have created a bit of a stir by announcing that they will be auctioning the revolver that was used to kill Jesse James, the famous Western outlaw and train robber. This claim is engraved on the Smith and Wesson revolver and there seems to be evidence to support its validity. It is interesting to speculate about the selling price and some wild estimates have been heard. Christies had a good sale of arms and armour coming along in March and in April the London Arms Fair celebrates its 50th show so the year is not all doom and gloom.

Frederick Wilkinson

# 1st SS Division Leibstandarte 'Adolf Hitler'



IN THE FIELD of militaria collecting, there has always been a great demand for the insignia of élite formations, whether they be paratroopers, special forces, fighter pilots or any units whose excellence in battle has raised them to élite status. The forces of Hitler's Third Reich are no different in this regard. Whilst the collecting of Third Reich regalia in general is an ever more popular field, the collecting of items specific to those units perceived as élite has resulted in such items now realising exceptionally high prices as the finite supply of items available can never hope to meet an ever growing collector demand.

In the armed forces of Hitler's Germany, many branches were

*SS-Oberführer Fritz Witt, commander of 12 SS-Panzer Division 'Hitlerjugend', shown here with an old pre-war friend 'Pape' Schuch. Both wear the officer pattern Sütterlin script 'Adolf Hitler' cuffband. (Hein Springer.)*



GORDON WILLIAMSON

THE MEN OF the Leibstandarte 'Adolf Hitler' established a fighting record second to none, sharing their élite status only with the Army's 'Grossdeutschland' Division. Here we take a brief look at their history and examine their cuffbands and shoulder strap monograms.

considered to be élite; The Panzerwaffe, the Luftwaffe's Jagdwaffe and the U-Bootwaffe to name but three. However, when one comes down to individual unit level, there are two particular units whose battlefield sacrifices combined with stunning military achievements would unquestionably put them high in the list of any élite units in military history. These are the premiere unit of the Waffen-SS, the Leibstandarte SS 'Adolf Hitler', and the German Army's finest, the Panzer Grenadier Division 'Grossdeutschland'.

Such was the phenomenal esprit-de-corps which existed within these formations that even today a thriving

*Truppenkameradschaft* exists for veterans of each of these units. Being personally acquainted with veterans of both, I can certainly confirm that their former members are still intensely proud of the military achievements of their old units. It is hoped that this article and its sequel will give the reader an idea of the wealth of collectable material, some of which is still available at not unreasonable cost to those interested in these élite formations.

## 1 SS-PANZER DIVISION LEIBSTANDARTE SS 'ADOLF HITLER'

To many, this was the élite unit of the Third Reich's military forces, though to say this is somewhat unfair to the many other fighting formations which also richly deserve the status of 'élite'. The history and background of the Leibstandarte (in original German military terminology, usually abbreviated to LSSAH or LAH) has been covered in depth in a number of fine books, so only a brief overview of its growth to élite Panzer Division status will be discussed here.

The early days of the National Socialist movement in Germany could hardly be described as peaceful. The terri-

*The Leibstandarte's motorcycle reconnaissance company drawn up in a pre-war parade. They are wearing black leather belts and straps instead of the ceremonial white ones over their black double-breasted greatcoats. (Bundesarchiv.)*

ble social and economic conditions led to the appearance of numerous extremist political organisations of which the Nazis were but one. Political 'debate' all too often quickly turned into running street battles with knives, clubs and any other handy weapon being used. Deaths were by no means uncommon. The Communist thugs were every bit as brutal as their Nazi counterparts, and subsequent reference to this period in Nazi literature as the *Kampfzeit* or Time of Struggle was no exaggeration.

Clearly, a better organised and more dependable organisation than the rabble of the general SA membership was required for the protection of the Party leadership. In May 1923 a small group of absolutely trustworthy and dependable SA men were formed into the *Stosstrupp Adolf Hitler* to provide protection for Hitler. This shortlived unit disappeared soon afterwards when the Nazi Party was banned in the aftermath of the attempted Munich Putsch. It reappeared in 1925 with the new title *Schutzstaffel* or SS. By 1926 it numbered but 250 men, though by the time Hitler had taken power in Germany it had expanded rapidly and in 1933 numbered some 152,000.



Hitler inspecting a Leibstandarte barracks. (Bruce Quarrie.)

Clearly, the SS had expanded beyond being merely a personal bodyguard for Hitler, so a further élite unit was formed within the SS to fulfil the function of a bodyguard unit. In September 1933, two existing units, *SS-Sonderkommando Zossen* and *SS-Sonderkommando Jüterbog*, were amalgamated to form *SS-Leibstandarte 'Adolf Hitler'*, and in May 1934 the new unit was authorised to wear the Adolf Hitler cufftitle for the first time.

This new, regimental-sized unit, was to form part of the so called *SS-Verfügungstruppe* (along with Regiments 'Deutschland', 'Germania', 'Der Führer', and medical, pioneer and signals detachments).

The LAH proved its political reliability under the command of Hitler's old friend Josef Dietrich, when it took part in the move to crush the power of Ernst Röhm's SA Stormtroopers in June 1934. Resplendent in their immaculate black parade uniforms with white leather belts and straps, the LAH took part in innumerable parades in the Germany of the mid- to late 1930s and gained a reputation for its impeccable drill, smart appearance, and first class military band. The unit quickly attracted the nickname 'The Asphalt Soldiers'. They certainly looked good, but would they be able to fight?

The LAH had no such doubt about itself. Recruited nationally, unlike most Army units which recruited within a geographical district, it attracted the cream of Germany's manhood. The men of the original LAH were all tall, supremely fit and powerful young men, imbued with a unique level of esprit de corps and self confidence. There were many young men in the LAH over 2m tall! No Prussian aristocrat could gain a commission through family connections — all had to first serve in the ranks. Officers were addressed by their rank, and not 'Sir', to engender a closer bond of comradeship within the various ranks. Locks were not permitted on chests or lockers as this implied mistrust of one's comrades.

By 1937 the Leibstandarte was wearing Field Grey dress, further to emphasise its military status. The Leibstandarte took part in the occupation of Austria and the Sudetenland, but still was not trusted by the Army who saw them as purely political troops. When war came in 1939, the LAH, as part of the *SS-*



*Verfügungstruppe*, saw action in the battle against Poland. The *SS-Verfügungstruppe* was used piecemeal rather than as a single force, the LAH being attached to 10 Armee in Silesia. It acquitted itself well, but relations with the Army were still not good. The Army accused SS troops of poor tactics and high losses, whilst the SS felt that they were being deliberately squandered by the Army on almost impossible tasks. Hitler, however, was proud of the achievements of his personal bodyguard and soon afterwards approved its expansion into a full motorised regiment. It was thus a significantly more powerful LAH which took part in the attack on the West in 1940.

As part of 18 Armee, the LAH fought alongside the Army's 227 Infanterie Division during the attack on Holland, making lightning advances, driving forward for as much as 50 miles in just six hours. After taking part in a victory parade through the Dutch capital LAH moved to the Belgian border and joined up with the *SS-Verfügungstruppe* before marching south through Huy and Dinant then crossing into France near Avesnes. The LAH then marched west and took part in the push to Dunkirk. They were fighting against tough British opposition and found the going difficult. Once the British were contained at Dunkirk, the LAH moved south against the remains of the French army. This unequal bat-

tle did not last long and the French declared Paris an open city on 11 June. A further 11 days later, the French had surrendered and the LAH moved into quarters in Metz where it spent the remainder of 1940 in refitting and training.

Hitler was delighted with the élan shown by his troops in combat and sanctioned the raising of the LAH to brigade strength in time for the attack on Yugoslavia in April 1941. It then moved south to enter Greece. Here the unit performed magnificently, capturing the heavily defended Klidi and Klisura Passes in the type of daredevil bravery for which it was to become renowned. The LAH's commander, SS-Obergruppenführer Dietrich, accepted the Greek surrender.

June 1941 saw the LAH fully committed to the attack on the Soviet Union, Operation 'Barbarossa'. It struck south as part of von Mackensen's III Corps, advancing through Dubno, Shitomir, Pottawka and Kriwoj-Rog, reaching the Crimean peninsula before turn-

ing north along the shores of the Sea of Azov, taking Mariupol and Taganrog, and crossing the River Don at Rostov. The LAH came to know the Soviet soldier as a formidable adversary, and suffered heavy casualties. The Russian winter also took its toll, with many deaths from frostbite. The combat reputation of the LAH however, grew as each month passed. In December 1941, General von Mackensen wrote... 'Every Division wishes it had the Leibstandarte as a neighbour, as much during the attack as the defence. Its inner discipline, cool daredevilry, cheerful enterprise and unshakable steadfastness in a crisis, its exemplary toughness, its camaraderie (deserving of special praise) — all these are outstanding and cannot be surpassed.'

In 1942, the LAH was reconstituted as a Panzer-Grenadier Division, having been withdrawn from the Eastern Front for a period of rest and refitting in France. It was soon thrown back into the maelstrom on the Eastern Front, however, and in 1943 took part in the massive

Josef 'Sepp' Dietrich  
decorating one of his men in  
the field, Russia, 1943.  
(Bildarchiv Preussischer  
Kulturbesitz.)





Propaganda Minister Goebbels congratulates Leibstandarte Sturmabteilung (Major) Kraus on the award of the Knights Cross. (Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz.)

tank battles at Kursk and suffered heavy losses during the battle for Kharkov. It was then withdrawn to northern Italy where it was further upgraded, to Panzer Division status, in October 1943.

It returned to the Eastern Front in time to see action near Kiev, at Tarnopol, and in the ferocious battles on the Dnieper. Time and time again, the LAH found itself rushed from sector

to sector where the greatest danger was faced. Time and again its appearance saved the day, but only at the cost of horrendous losses. By the spring of 1944 it was well nigh decimated and once again had to be withdrawn, this time to Belgium, for rest and refitting.

With a strength of over 21,000 men, the division was once again ready for battle when the Allies landed in Normandy in June 1944. Against overwhelming odds, the LAH once again fought magnificently, but by the time it was forced to withdraw through the Falaise gap in August this once mighty Panzer division

had a strength of only some 30 tanks. The LAH once again had shown itself fearless and ready to take on any odds, but this attitude inevitably led to horrendous casualties and the replacements received were no longer of the calibre of the early days.

The LAH was withdrawn to Germany to be rebuilt once again, only to be thrown into Hitler's ill-fated Ardennes offensive, where overwhelming Allied superiority of numbers and, in particular, air superiority, saw it virtually destroyed yet again. It was then rushed to the Eastern Front to take part in the unsuccessful counter-attack at Lake Balaton in Hungary. By now only a shadow of its former self, the LAH withdrew into Austria where it fought in the battle for Vienna. It ended the war on the Eastern Front, though many of its personnel managed to make their way west and surrender to Anglo-American forces and thus avoid Soviet captivity.

Today, the former soldiers of the Leibstandarte have a thriving *Truppenkameradschaft* and old comrades meet regularly to trade reminiscences and remember those friends who fell in battle.

### THE INSIGNIA

The Leibstandarte was first granted a cuffband in May 1934. This consisted of a woven black rayon band with silvered thread edging, (seven strands top and bottom) onto which the legend 'Adolf Hitler' was worked in pseudo-gothic 'Frakturschrift'. This was executed in machine-embroidered silver grey threads for non-commissioned ranks and hand-embroidered silver threads for



Leibstandarte Knights Cross winner Obersturmführer (Lieutenant) Georg Karck. The 'Adolf Hitler' cuffband is clearly visible, but note that no LAH cypher is worn on the shoulder strap. This was by no means uncommon. (Hans Hinrich Karck.)

officers.

This particular band was very short lived and was soon changed to germanic 'Sütterlinschrift', an antiquated form of German handwriting almost indecipherable to those unfamiliar with it. It remained in silver grey machine embroidery for non-commissioned ranks and silver thread hand embroidery for officers.

The first major change came in 1939 when, for reasons of economy, the officers' pattern

A Tiger I of the 3rd Company, schwere SS-Panzer Abteilung 101, bearing the insignia of I SS-Panzer Korps, on its way to Normandy in June 1944. (Bundesarchiv.)



The machine-woven aluminium wire officers' cuffband. The reverse portion behind the lettering has a small portion of black cloth sewn over it to prevent fraying. (Courtesy B.L. Davis.)

The machine-embroidered other ranks' pattern 'Adolf Hitler' cuffband shown at bottom, together with an exceedingly rare embroidered version of the 'Hitlerjugend' cuffband above. This latter was obtained direct from the 'Hitlerjugend' veteran who wore it. (John White.)

The final, so called 'Bevo-woven', version of the 'Adolf Hitler' cuffband, executed in grey thread on black. (Courtesy B.L. Davis.)

A rather crude privately produced version, with hand-embroidered lettering on a coarse black cloth, and silver cord edging. (Courtesy B.L. Davis.)

A good quality machine-woven variant, thought to have been produced in Holland or Belgium, woven in off white thread on black. (Courtesy B.L. Davis.)

band was produced in aluminium thread machine weave rather than hand embroidery. Senior NCOs are also known to have worn this officer pattern cuffband.

In 1943, as a further economic measure, a new form of the band was introduced which was entirely woven in one operation, in light grey artificial silk on a black base. These bands were produced by the firm of BEVO-WUPPERTAL. That firm's trade name can often be found woven into the reverse side of the band at one end. No officers' version of this band was produced and indeed it is known to have been worn by both officers and non-commissioned ranks.

In addition to these regulation patterns, unofficial privately produced versions are known ranging from the crude to the excellent. Collectors should be aware that, with the exception apparently of the machine-woven aluminium wire officers' version, all of these types are being widely reproduced, some



very expertly.

The Leibstandarte is often considered as the 'parent division' of the 12 SS-Panzer Division 'Hitlerjugend'. This is principally because the LAH furnished most of the officer and NCO cadre around which the 'Hitlerjugend' Division was formed. Thus many wartime photos of 'HJ' Division personnel show them wearing LAH insignia. The 'HJ' Division did have its own cuffband, produced in both the more common woven, and, very rarely, machine-embroidered forms, but they appear to have been only rarely worn.

In addition to its cuffband, the Leibstandarte was granted a distinctive shoulder strap cypher, bearing the initials 'LAH' in monogram form. For ranks up to

SS-Untersturmführer (2nd Lieutenant) Erwin Bartmann clearly shows the slip on type monogram on his white infantry piped NCO's shoulder strap. (Courtesy Erwin Bartmann.)







**Above, Left to right.** Early pre-war strap with black and silver twist edging, and large flamboyant monogram. Unpiped shoulder strap with small angular monogram. Small but still rounded monogram embroidered in yellow signals colour on yellow signals piped strap. (John White.)

**Below, Left to right.** Wartime slip-on monogram in silver grey embroidery on black, blue transport piped strap. Pink Panzer piped Oberscharführer (Company Sergeant Major) strap with white metal NCO monogram. Golden yellow cavalry piped Oberscharführer strap with grey metal monogram. (John



Unterscharführer (Sergeant), this was machine embroidered into the shoulder strap (later on a separate cloth 'slip-on'). For other NCO ranks it was die struck in white or grey metal with prong fixings on the reverse, and for officers it was in bronze or later gilt metal.

Earlier versions of the other ranks' shoulder strap featured a very large, rounded, flamboyant cypher, which later became smaller, and was finally rather small and angular, almost identical to the metal cypher.

Other unique clothing worn by the Leibstandarte included white leather accoutrements (belt, 'Y' straps, bayonet frog, etc) for the black pre-war parade dress, and a special version of the woven emblem for the sports vest, featuring an eagle's head and the 'LAH' monogram. As these do not relate to any combat use by the

division they will not be covered further here.

One final consideration allowed to the Leibstandarte related to the special Panzer style uniforms in black or field grey. Under normal regulations, the usual NCO rank collar braid was not to be worn on these uniforms. This regulation did not apply to the LAH, however, and so these uniforms are often seen worn by LAH personnel, with this braid in place.

Quite apart from the actual insignia, collectors should consider a wealth of other material apertaining to the Leibstandarte which will turn up from time to time in dealers' catalogues. These include promotion and award documents to

Award document for an Infantry Assault Badge to a Leibstandarte NCO. (Mader.)



Leibstandarte personnel, either pre-printed with, or bearing the rubber stamp seal of the unit. Personal ID documents such as Wehrpasses and Soldbüchs also turn up from time to time, and finally one should not forget the number of good clear wartime photographs which are not too difficult to obtain, showing LAH personnel wear-

ing their distinctive insignia. By carefully choosing the type of regalia to go for, the average collector can easily build a good collection pertaining to this élite unit without incurring huge costs.

ME

A fine example of a Leibstandarte promotion certificate. (Hans Hinrich Karck.)

Leibstandarte **SS Adolf Hitler** Berlin-Lichterfelde den 31. März 1937.

2a des

**SS** - Oberscharführer Georg Karck, Nr. 17 690, Stab/LSSAH.

**Beförderung!**

1 Ich beehre Sie zum **SS** - Hauptscharführer o.Ü.

2 Tag der Beförderung ist der **1. April 1937.**

Der Führer der Leibstandarte **SS Adolf Hitler**

**SS** Obergruppenführer

**BESITZ - ZEUGNIS**

Dem **SS** - Hauptscharführer **Georg Karck**

**VERLEIHE ICH DAS**

**INFANTRIE - STURMABZEICHEN**

3. April 1937

**SS** Obergruppenführer





## 'SHARPE AND HARPER MARCH AGAIN...'

RICHARD MOORE

THE RICHARD SHARPE novels by Bernard Cornwell have millions of devotees. These adventures of a Rifleman in the Peninsular and at Waterloo have a ring of conviction which has often led them to be likened to the 'Hornblower' series. Now Celtic Films/Picture Palace Productions have recreated for Central Television the first two books in the series, which will be broadcast in May 1993. Richard Moore, military advisor to the films, gives an 'insider' view of them.

A COLUMN OF redcoated soldiers marches slowly up a steep dusty track which winds up into the mountains, white and stark in the sun. The temperature is 95 degrees and the soldiers are dry. Heading the column is a group of splendidly mounted British officers, scarlet and gold, red-faced and wilting. The drum major flourishes his baton, and the drums cease. They turn left onto a baking hot parade ground, where several Riflemen in dark green uniforms regard them sullenly. Sir Arthur Wellesley, accompanied by his Spanish ally, General Cuesta, rides off in the distance. The column halts, each man leaning for-

ward under the weight of his heavy pack. Overhead, the ever-present eagle glides high in the sky, our adopted talisman, watchful.

It could be a scene from anywhere in the Peninsular during the War of 1808-1814, but it is not. It is a scene from the film soon to be shown in Britain, *Sharpe's Eagle*. As the soldiers slope off to find shade and light up their *papirosi* cigarettes, and the other officers dismount to smoke their Western cigarettes, the Director takes over from our Colonel, and prepares the next scene to be shot. It is the Crimea, near Balaklava, and it is high summer, 1992.

The two films we made — *Sharpe's Eagle* and *Sharpe's Rifles* — are based on two books in the best-selling series of the adventures of a Rifleman of the 95th during the Peninsular War, written by Bernard Cornwell. Richard Sharpe becomes an officer



**Top of page:** *Sharpe's Rifles* with the obnoxious Colonel Sir Henry Simmerson and Lieutenant Christian Gibbons at Talavera. **Left:** Colonel of Chasseurs Pierre de l'Eclain and 'the man in black', the Count of Mouromorto.



raised from the ranks, a very irregular fellow, but who unfailingly appears at every scene of heavy action. The books are very readable, and it became obvious that they would become a film one day. I began my association with the project over five years ago, and was very happy to be able to see it through to the conclusion.

We left England after shooting a short scene there in early August, to continue filming in the tremendous locations chosen in the Crimea. Although not completely Spanish, they are everyone's ideal Spain, with high sierras, wide plains and endless vistas, craggy and hard — Rifle country. No-one had to act very hard to portray a sun-scorched soldier in the climate; indeed, it was marvellous to see how people kept going in the heat.

In *Sharpe's Eagle*, the army is joined by the South Essex Regiment from England, under its despotic Colonel, Sir Henry Simmerson. Despite losing a colour to a French cavalry attack, flogged at every opportunity, and deserted by their officers, the soldiers rally under a newly promoted Captain, Richard Sharpe, and help defeat the French at the battle of Talavera. In the film, Sharpe is played by Sean Bean, easily giving Sharpe his more 'earthy' character. Sir Henry is portrayed by Michael Cochrane, who makes Sir Henry 'the man you love to hate'. Our soldiers, the South Essex, were all Ukrainian Army conscripts, which made the creation of the regiment particularly fulfilling, and very true to the book. They were, as Lord Wellington later said, 'fine fellows', and I became very attached to them. Their life at present (indeed, has been for a while) is not one which the British soldier would find very attractive.

Due to the social, economic and political changes within the CIS, the common soldier's and sailor's lot in the Ukraine is not a happy one. But my association with them became a long and happy one, including a smuggled trip into barracks where, in a haze of vodka, and in return for their enlistment into the British Army of 1809, I enlisted in their army of 1992. In fact, when the temperature began to drop towards the end of filming in November, so many of the crew were wearing heavy Russian Army coats and hats, sold to them by the ever-accommodating soldiers, that it looked as though we'd all enlisted. As their colonel stated

one day, 'Much more of this and we'll all be marching through Red Square in our underwear!'

*Sharpe's Rifles*, the first book in the series chronologically, establishes Sharpe as a leader of men, ruthless and hard, but quick witted and resourceful. Fighting not only the enemy, but his own band of Riflemen, cut off from home and desperate, led by the enormous Harper (played in the film by Darragh O'Malley) who, despite fist fights and attempted assassinations at first, becomes Sharpe's friend and ally in ensuing novels. After an attack by French cavalry, in which almost the entire command is destroyed, Sharpe leads the survivors through the guerrilla band which, led by the magnificent Don Blas Vivar (played by Simon Andreu), raises again the Gonfalon of Santiago and carries the war back to the French after a spectacular battle at one of the purpose-built sets on location, at the foot of a vast volcanic plateau of awe-inspiring beauty. The French are led by a fanatical but very professional Colonel, de l'Eclat, played very convincingly by Malcolm Jamieson, a very good rider and swordsman, who we were all sad to lose. As the gun-smoke fades after the fight, Sharpe and the riflemen march out back to the army, and the scene is set for *Sharpe's Eagle* and subsequent episodes.

Teresa, the Spanish guerrilla leader, female but fearsome, appears earlier than in the books by starting with us in *Sharpe's Rifles*. Played by Assumpta Serna, a tall brunette who certainly looks the part, she provided love interest and also the odd ear-splitting boom from one of her two naval boarding pistols — she very rarely had to use the spring bayonets attached.

The actors playing the ordinary rank and file Riflemen, five in all, began their education at the Holland and Holland Gun Club near London back in July, learning to fire and load the Baker rifles they would be using in the film. After that, they learned to march, and then began to assume those other less notable qualities found in no drill manual I've seen, that would turn them into believable British soldiers on the screen. Using my knowledge of the period, they each created their character before the camera started, each with their own little 'quirks', props and uniform, and mannerisms. Whilst the

British officers in the mess look upon them as roadsweepers or scum, in a fight, they can more than hold their own, as they go on to show, with no 'stand-ins'.

Our cavalry were played by an assortment of Russian, Moldavian and Ukrainian stuntmen, led by Slava Burlachko (a regiment on his own!). What they lacked in drill they made up for in enthusiasm! As the Iron Duke once said... 'I do not know what the enemy thinks of them but by God! They frighten me!' They certainly looked as though they'd seen a hard campaign, and behaved accordingly. Where they put all the food they ate I could not fathom... Some of their tack and saddlery was worth a look, from old Hungarian cavalry gear to the modern equipage just out of service with the Soviet Army. One or two Spanish and Italian mountain troops' saddlery too, and a single British saddle from around WWI. Although they didn't look very comfortable, I rode out for an hour once over the plains and back and suffered no aches from them — they are quite different to sit on compared to the usual English saddle, especially covered in sheepskins, fodder bags, waterbottles, valises and the rest of the troopers' belongings.

The French column attack at Talavera during the film was made up of the rest of the battalion from the Ukrainian Army and around 20 extras hired from Yalta Studios. Based on the 21eme de Ligne of the Napoleonic Association, with Voltigeurs, Grenadiers and Fusiliers, plus Eagle party and drummers, they were doomed to attack the South Essex — expecting an easy victory but becoming the recipient of their 'four shots per minute' marksmanship. The special effects used in this sequence make it a gruesome business to watch, and in some of the scenes where we were simulating incoming shell fire from British artillery, the noise and the smoke made some of our younger soldiers almost weep and break down from the concussion and the fact that they thought we were really to advance into that boiling plain again after the first take. One was enough. A soldier who afterwards had a pebble lodged in the numerals '21' on his shako plate, had a dent which looked so like a musket ball strike that I believe he took it off and showed it to anyone who'd look at it for the rest of the day!

The costumes for the film were assembled or designed by John Mollo, veteran of such films as *Charge Of The Light Brigade* and *Doctor Zhivago*. Some costumes were veterans on their own, showing labels from *War and Peace*, and even Bondarchuk's *Waterloo*. The costume I wear in the film was from *The Adventures of (Brigadier) Gerard*, and a lovely touch, as it started me along the road to my hobby (more a way of live now!) over 25 years ago. Andrew Mollo designed and supervised the building of the sets which lend so much to the atmosphere of the film, so much so that it is sometimes impossible to see where stone becomes polystyrene!

Sir Arthur Wellesley is portrayed in the film by David Troughton, a first-rate actor who spent time on learning about the Duke and assuming his mannerisms, speech and appearance, in order to give another convincing performance. Brian Cox plays Major Hogan, Wellesley's 'gofer' and Sharpe's mentor, unconventional and clever, using Sharpe to achieve Wellesley's desires, sometimes unknowingly. Gavan O'Herlihy, playing Captain Leroy of the South Essex, also adds an unconventional touch with his whiskers and colonial accent. Gavan's father played Marshal Ney in the film *Waterloo*, another connection with history.

Indeed, there are so many historical connections and parallels between what we were doing in 1992 about a scene in 1809, filming battles and fights on ground where there were battles and fights in 1854, that I find it hard to list them. The first that springs to mind was the vast problems we had and were endured in 1854 by the British Army here, of a logistical nature — simply transport, food and shelter. The unit managers on the film deserved a long service award for the way they overcame or endured problems that would have sunk the Commissariat of 1809 or 1854 without trace. Where the army of 1809 or 1854 had cholera or dysentery, we had an obscure bug named appropriately 'Guardia', to which all but a hardy two succumbed. Relations between the crew and the Crimean authorities were exactly the same as between Wellington's HQ and the junta of Cadiz, and even the Great Gale which destroyed the British Army camps on the Sapoune Heights



Major Blas Vivar, charismatic leader of the Spanish Cazadores, with Theresa, whom Sharpe later marries.

in November 1854 visited us right on schedule and smashed all our tents and equipment, blocking the roads with fallen cypress trees. Before the battle of Talavera, and just before we were to start filming our battle, our soldiers dressed as Spaniards began chasing snakes and pointing their pistols and muskets at them, which is exactly what happened in 1809. As Richard Sharpe was arguing with Sir Henry concerning Wellesley's orders concerning the fact that all food and drink should be paid for and not stolen, our South Essex soldiers were in the peach orchards a hundred yards away filling their haversacks with stolen fruit (after which they suffered the inevitable consequences!)

The economic, social and political scene in the CIS and the vast differences between life there and in England meant few entertainments in those rare off-duty hours. I devoted myself to learning as much as possible about the Crimean War and visited the battlefields at every opportunity. Whilst not in my particular area of



interest they did provide much in the way of exploration and excitement, and if anyone cares to enter into correspondence, I found out much about the area, until recently not very hospitable to visitors. Sweeps with the metal detector provided endless heaps of WWII shell splinters, cartridges, shells, etc, but a few Crimean War finds still emerge. The two dioramas, one at Balaklava and the other in Sebastopol, along with the Black Sea Fleet Museum and

the Malakoff Tower, are well worth a visit if you find yourself out there. A good map or two, binoculars, flask and boots are a must if you go to tramp around on Inkerman Heights. Yea, I have walked in the Valley of the Shadow of Death — more later, perhaps, in another article, where space permits.

Balaklava Harbour is still the quiet little deep-water inlet it was when Jason and the Argonauts landed there, or the British Fleet in 1854. As you approach it, the skyline seems familiar — indeed it has hardly changed since the Genoese Fort was lithoed in the *Illustrated Weekly News* of that year. In place of the British Fleet, it is now filled with Black Sea Fleet submarines and supports. A climb to the top of the cliffs is recommended for the view (both ways). Try to avoid the Guardhouse, though, on top — they point guns and aren't friendly. The great silo where the big subs sleep looks very James Bond-ish.

After the Crimea, we left for Portugal, and the Lines of Torres Vedras. A rather startling culture shock this, for me especially, having been out in the Crimea for over a hundred days at that point. Again, spectacular locations to film in, particularly the palaces such as the Correio do Mor at Loures, near Lisbon. Again, in a rare free two days off, a visit to the local car hire provided the means to head north for a visit to Busaco, Obidos, Rolica, Vimiero and the Lines. Although most spectacular from the air, the Lines are very extensive and can eas-

ily be followed with a good map and clutching a book such as Jac Weller's *Wellington in the Peninsula*. Two redoubts near Torres Vedras had been recently restored prior to a visit by the present Duke of Wellington, and were carefully explored. It is not hard to see how the Portuguese countryside easily lent itself to this strategy, of fixed defences and 'scorched earth'. Busaco I found fascinating — how the French scaled those heights to get up to Crauford I couldn't imagine. In places where a quite fit, energetic military advisor with no encumbrances except a camera and map slipped and slid around, the French sent heavy columns up the slopes to attack the Anglo-Portuguese Army placed on top, heavily-laden with musket and ammunition. The museum there is a little disappointing, and the famous blue star on top of the monument looks as though it has been in a battle itself. The Convent and hotel is mind-boggling in its Gothic splendour, and as Lady Longford says in her book, Wellington's olive tree still holds out its branches to posterity, less one cutting now. Wellington's command post is indifferently signposted, and anyone visiting the place should swot up beforehand.

Obidos, however, where it all started, is quite a surprise. It is a walled town, well looked after and a pleasant walk around its narrow streets. The advance of the 95th can be easily plotted from a point near the old windmills to the west, and the French retreat followed to Rolica, and on to Vimiero (built over but with another 'Batalha' monument to photograph). Maíra and Sintra (as it is now



Sharpe (Sean Bean) with the King's Colour of the 'South Essex'









spelt before anyone writes in) are beautiful, and the palace where Wellesley met Moore is still there to be found. Lisbon I scoured for things I could add to my collection but *Be Warned!* It is very expensive to

**Facing page:** *Not all the enemies are French; Sir Henry Simmerson 'whom God preserve or preferably not' and his lackey, Lieutenant Gibbons, who later... but you'd better read the book.*

buy those much-sought after souvenirs. The Peninsular War Gallery at the Castelo San Jorge was closed, much to my chagrin.

So — after the 'Officer' Mess' in Lisbon, the film ended as we began in a series of pistol and rifle shots, fired by me and recorded for sound dubbing purposes, full charges and unfailing ignition, for realism. Most of the firearms used in the film are full-functioning flintlock muzzle loaders, and in the

hands of an experienced muzzle loader proved no problem. Ten of the Ukrainian conscripts were trained to use the Brown Bess musket, loaded by them using paper cartridges, and they did extremely well — heart warming, in fact, and a precious memory I'll never forget. Four shots per minute? Easy!

As it says in the books, Sharpe and Harper will march again... it is a long road to Waterloo. **MI**

*French infantry charge screaming at the British lines. In the centre is the Eagle which Sharpe and Harper capture.*

*Men of the 'South Essex' Regiment prepare to withstand the onslaught.*





# The Bren Light Machine-Gun



AS EARLY AS 1915 a need had been identified by the British Army for an easily portable infantry support weapon, capable of being used both in attack and defence. This requirement was filled by the American-designed Lewis which gave good service during the Great War, but by 1918 it was clear that its weight of 27lb, and the relatively clumsy magazine and barrel arrangement, could be improved.

Despite tests of various other weapons in the 1920s, it was not until 1930 that the Small Arms Committee obtained an example of the Czechoslovak ZB gas-operated light machine-gun from Ceskoslovenska Zbrojovka Akciova Spolecnost of Brno. It would appear that the original order was for the 1926 model (VZ.26) but that which was actually supplied was the slightly improved 1927 version (VZ.27). The tests which followed showed the superiority of the ZB to anything currently available; one of the report writers stated that the functioning was 'excellent throughout', and he doubted whether 'any other gun has ever passed through so many tests... giving so little trouble'. Over the next few years trials were conducted on other models of ZB, notably the ZB30 and the specially modified ZGB, and the weapon was rechambered from its native 7.92mm to .303in, necessitating a curved magazine instead of a straight one to accommodate the old-fashioned British rimmed cartridge case.

By 1934 the decision had been taken to make a British version of the ZGB and a production line was set up at the Royal Small Arms Factory, Enfield. At this juncture the name was changed to 'Bren' by taking the first two letters of Brno, the location of the Czech

Dr STEPHEN BULL

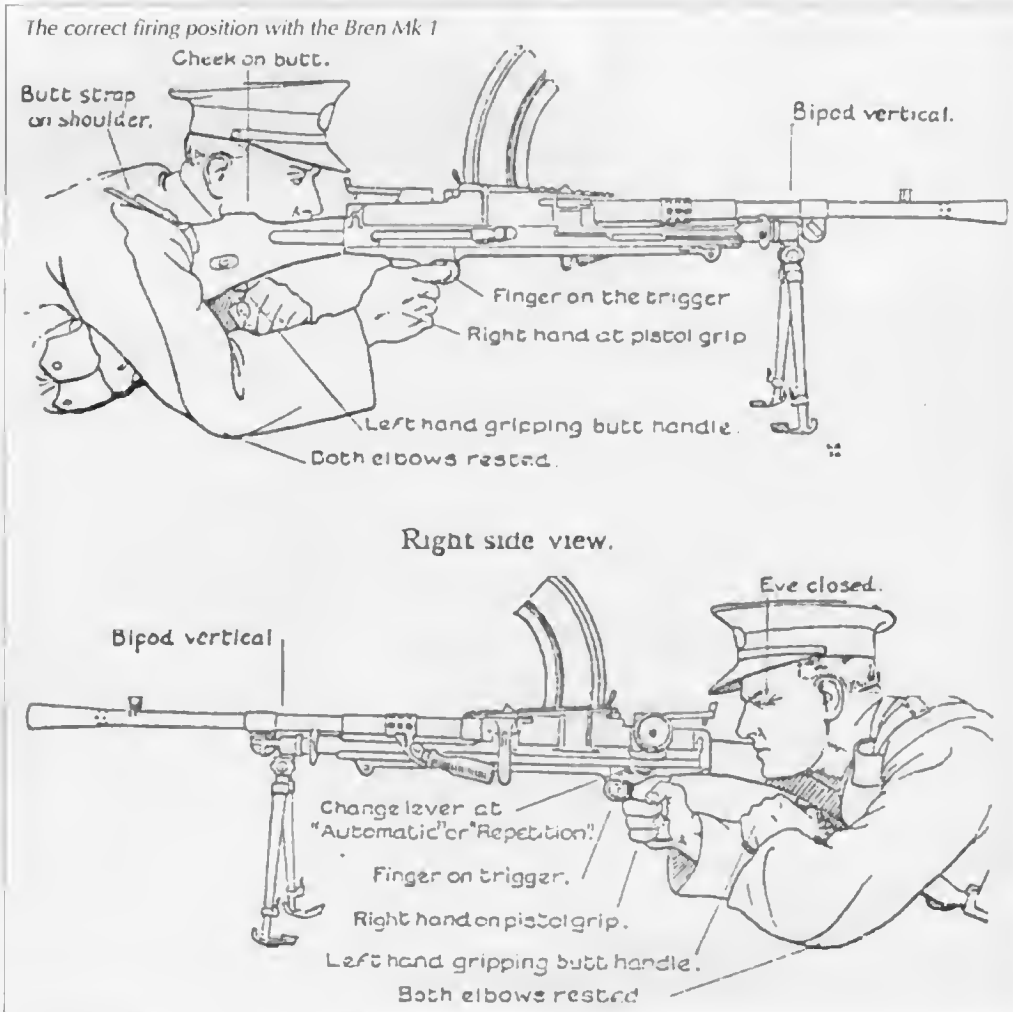
RELIABLE, ROBUST and easily maintained, highly accurate and simple to use, the Bren gun well deserves the accolade 'immortal' and is still highly regarded more than 50 years after it was first produced.

factory, and adding them to the first two letters of Enfield. The first gun came off the production line, acceptance soon followed and rapid production commenced to re-equip the Army.

According to the official

manual, 'Small Arms Training, Light Machine Gun', of 1939, the practical average rate of fire was 120 rounds (or four magazines) per minute allowing for both magazine and barrel changes. It was recommended that when firing full automatic

this be done in short bursts of four or five rounds, adjusting aim as necessary between bursts. Since the gun was air-cooled the barrel required changing after about ten magazines, normally a fairly swift and easy operation. Effective range when fired from a bipod was about 1,000 yards, but greater ranges being possible in good visibility if a tripod was used. Accuracy was remarkably good for an automatic weapon, recoil being almost 'negative' so the weapon had to be held into the





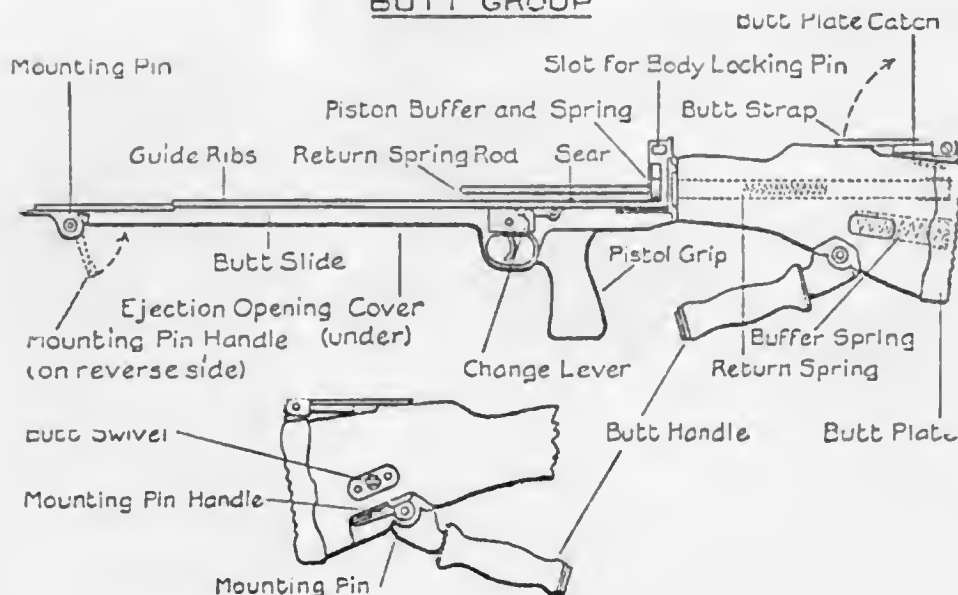
shoulder tightly.

In World War II the Bren was usually issued one per infantry section although its usefulness and reliability often led to the deployment of two. The Bren team itself was usually a pair of men: the gunner himself who carried the weapon and a 'number two' who, in addition to his own weapon, would carry the magazines and a spare barrel. The magazines themselves were supplied in wooden boxes of 12 but they were normally carried into action by the soldiers in the standard 'utility' pouches of the 1937 web equipment, in a battle jerkin, or even thrust into the larger pockets of Battledress or smocks. In a defensive position Brens could be kept working by the simple expedient of refilling empty magazines with rounds stripped from the clips carried by riflemen in the section.

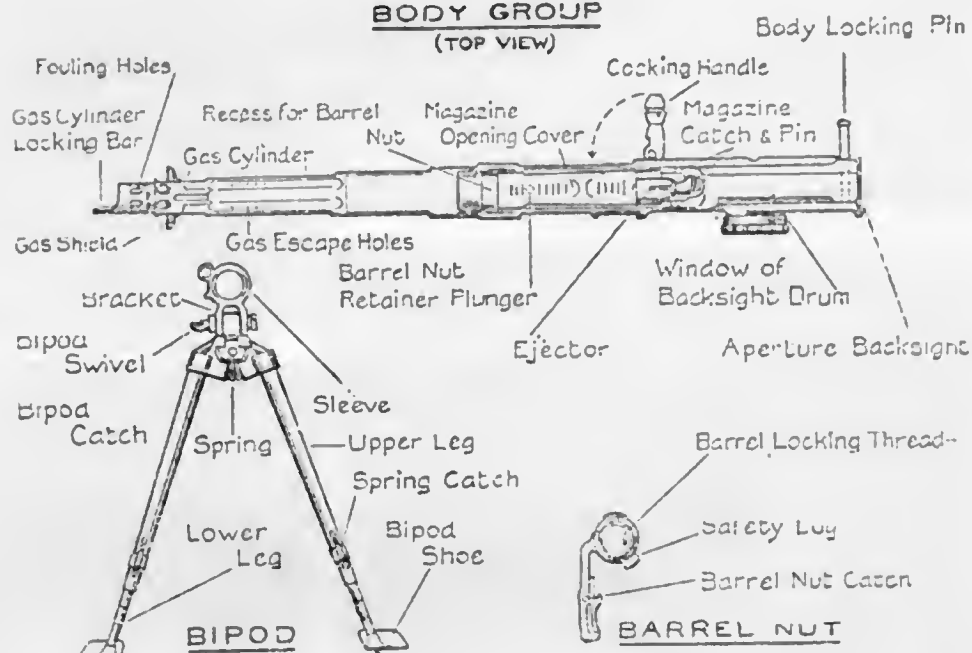
During World War II the Bren progressed through four different marks mainly aimed at lightening and simplifying the original, changing the sights and replacing the original telescopic bipod by one of fixed length. Contract details for the period show that manufacture was diversified and contracted out not only to Inglis of Canada but to a consortium of eight British Companies known collectively as the 'Monotype' Group. Contracts for accessories, components and magazines were given to companies as diverse as BSA; Meccano; Imperial Typewriter; Vickers and several car companies including Daimler, Austin, Tudor Autos and Bexley Motor Works. Eventually over 80 companies were to be involved and a third of a million Bren guns were made.

After World War II the Bren continued in service and, following a prototype modification known as the X10E1, many weapons were converted to the 7.62mm NATO calibre. The standard Army issue was subsequently known as the L4A 2 or 4 Light Machine Gun, with the L4A3 for the Navy. Even the appearance of the 'General Purpose Machine Gun' failed to spell the end for the Bren, and it has seen extensive active service in recent years. At the last time of asking, in early 1993, some Territorial Army units still have stock of the faithful 'Bren'.

## BUTT GROUP



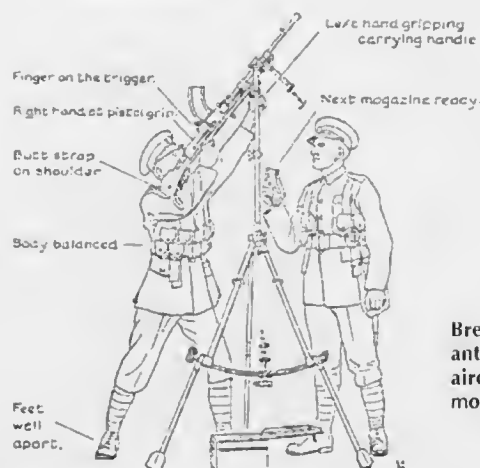
## BODY GROUP (TOP VIEW)



1988.  
HMSO *Small Arms Training Vol 1 Pamphlet No 4 Light Machine Gun*, London, 1939.  
F.W.A. Hobart, *The Bren Gun*, Small Arms Profile 13, Windsor, undated.  
E.C. Ezell, *Small Arms of the World*, Harrisburg, 1990.  
**Specifications, Bren 303in Mk 1/2**  
Calibre: 0303in (7.7mm)  
Length overall: 45.25-45.5in (1,150-1,156mm)  
Barrel length: 25in (635mm)  
Weight unloaded: 22.12-22.15lb (10.03-10.15kg)  
Muzzle velocity: 2,400-2,440fps (731-744m/s)  
Rate of fire: (normal) 120rpm; (cyclic) 500rpm  
Magazine: 30-round box

### Further reading

T.B. Dugelby, *The Bren Gun Saga*, Toronto, 1986.  
I. Skennerton, *British Small Arms of World War II*, Margate, Australia,



Bren anti-aircraft mounting



# 'Steady Hands, Patience and a Brush with One Hair'

BILL HORAN

A NEW BOOK celebrating the work of some of the world's most outstanding figure modellers provided the inspiration for this article designed to provoke, tantalise and inspire...

'THEY'RE SO SMALL!!... Look at all the detail... You must use a magnifying glass... I can't even see it... I would never have the patience... you must have very steady hands... do you use a brush with one hair?... There is probably not a miniaturist in the world who has not heard, in one language or another, at least a few of these exclamations from someone viewing their miniatures for the first time. After a few years, most miniaturists develop a standard response to each one whenever the topic comes up. When asked by Martin Windrow to write a book on miniatures, I decided to try to provide something of a visual response to those curious about this fascinating and enjoyable hobby. The result was *Military Model Showcase*.'

## THE PAINTERS

There is no skill so essential to the successful miniaturist as the ability to paint well. The most brilliantly detailed kit, the most ingeniously modified conversion, the most magnificently crafted scratchbuilt figure, even the most breathtakingly composed diorama, can all be fatally flawed by mediocre painting. *The one common thread that links all successful miniature art is good painting.* Painting is outwardly the most discernible feature of every miniature, and as such has a 'make or break' impact on the first impression made on the viewer.

Greg DiFranco's rendition of Chota Sahib's 'Daffadar,

\*A 64-page paperback book with over 100 colour photographs published by Windrow & Greene in their Europa-Militaire series. ISBN 1-872004-28-8; £9.95.



**Right:** *Western Sarmation (Alan), 8th century AD, by Peter Wilcox. (Derek Hansen.) Below right:* 'Cold Steel' by Peter Twist. (Jean-Louis Viau.) **Below:** *Battle of the Pyramids by Joe Berton. (Bill Horan).*







**Above:** Bonaparte by Andrei Koribanics. (Bill Horan.) **Above right:** Sergeant, 66th (Berkshire) Regiment, 1880, by Phil Kessling. (Bill Horan.) **Right:** Trooper, Heavy Camel Regiment, 1885, by Bill Horan. (Bill Horan.)

Madras Lancers' captures the details of the campaign medals and turban design with stunning precision, while the varying shades of blue (trousers, kurta) and brown (wood, leather) are convincingly rendered. The intense cold of the Russian winter of 1943 can be clearly seen in the face of the exquisitely painted Little Generals kit, 'German Infantryman' by **Jim Ryan**. Jim collected a silver medal for his collection of stock painted figures at the 1992 MFCA Show. Welsh modeler **Gary Joslyn** earned a gold medal at the 1992 Euro-Militaire competition for his tanker of the 17th/21st Lancers.

### THE CONVERTERS

There is no term that encompasses so much in the military miniature art form as does the word 'conversion'. Technically, the term's meaning is simple; to modify or 'convert' an existing figure into some-

thing different. The problem with this term is that it can be applied to an existing kit to which the most innocuous changes have been made, such as the addition of a moustache, or the replacement of a spear with a sword. It is also used to describe figures that are virtually scratchbuilt, with the exception of the use of a few commercially available accessories, such as a rifle or a set of hands. Between these two extremes is a wide range of conversion projects.

Often, a relatively simple change to a good commercial kit can make it even more dynamic. **Phil Kessling** substituted a highly animated Verlinden head on a D.F. Grieve kit, 'Sergeant, 66th (Berkshire) Regiment, 1880', winning a gold medal at Chicago in 1990 as a result. At the 1983 MFCA Show, **Andrei Koribanics** drew a very large crowd around his exhibit. The







*Daffadar, Madras Lancers, by Greg Di France. (Bill Horan.)*

attraction was his marvelously romanticised 'Bonaparte', a gold medal winner for this talented Grand Master. The body and head were reworked from Historex components, and the blowing greatcoat skirts were skillfully fashioned from sheet aluminium. The author's 'Trooper of the Heavy Camel Regiment, 1885' was created using a few commercially available accessories, and a lot of epoxy putty! The camel is a modified Andrea Miniatures kit, under a mass of scratch-built equipment.

**Brian Stewart** relies primarily on A&B putty for his conversion and scratchbuilding work. For his efforts, he's become a virtual sure bet for a gold medal at any competition he enters, including Euro-Militaire in 1988, and numerous triumphs

at Chicago, MFCA and the California Show, where he has been honoured with the title 'Master' for sustained excellence. His 'Gallic Warrior', an extensively converted Sovereign kit, is one of his finest. Fascination with the ancient world is also a dominant theme in the work of **Peter Wilcox**. Like his American counterpart Brian Stewart, Peter makes the most of John Tassel's 80mm Sovereign Miniatures, using them as a solid foundation for his extensive conversions, including his impressive 'Western Sarmation (Alan) 8th Century AD'. Peter takes justifiable pride in the time and care that go into each one of his masterpieces, particularly the intricately painted patterned clothing seen on many of them. It shows!

## THE SCRATCHBUILDERS

Building a figure from scratch (the entire figure sculptured by the modeller) is one of the miniaturist's greatest challenges. While many have tinkered with conversions, even going so far as to scratchbuild clothing and equipment for a figure, the daunting prospect of rendering a lifelike face, hands, weapon, shoes (or even bare feet), is enough to strike fear into the heart of the most determined miniaturist! Before the boom in accessory part sales, scratchbuilding was the only way for a modeller to recreate figures outside the mainstream. However, as parts have become more plentiful, scratchbuilding has become dominated by figure designers for major kit manufacturers.

The American soldier is depicted with drama and accuracy by professional sculptor/painter **Ron Tunison**. Ron is best known for his American Civil War figures, such as his superb Confederate Cavalryman entitled 'One of Jeb's Boys'. Working exclusively in Milliput, **Michel Saez** is, by his own admission, a very slow worker, but the results speak for themselves. Michel has become one of the most respected miniaturists in the world by modeling exquisite pieces like his bust of a 'Chasseur d'Afrique, 1860'.

There is certainly no shortage of impressively modelled work being done in the non-military field these days. **Mike Good's** brilliantly painted 12-inch kit, 'Nosferatu', came close to winning Best of Show at the MFCA and California Shows in 1991 and 1992, respectively.

## VIGNETTES & DIORAMAS

In the vignette and diorama, all elements of military miniature art come together with another universally appealing element: a story. First a few words of explanation about terms. A vignette is a scene consisting of approximately two to five figures, of relatively modest size. A diorama is a scene comprised of more than five figures. The vignettes and dioramas of military miniature art are its greatest achievements, and are consistently the most popular pieces at a miniature exhibition. Still, the prospect of embarking on a major diorama can be very daunting indeed. Good dioramas require careful planning, thoughtful composition and a dynamic subject. Most of all they require a lot of time. As most miniaturists like to consider themselves to be very

methodical, careful artists (some proudly claiming a single stock kit took them months or even years to paint), a multiple figure scene can be very intimidating. For this reason, far fewer dioramas and vignettes are seen at exhibitions than any other form of miniature.

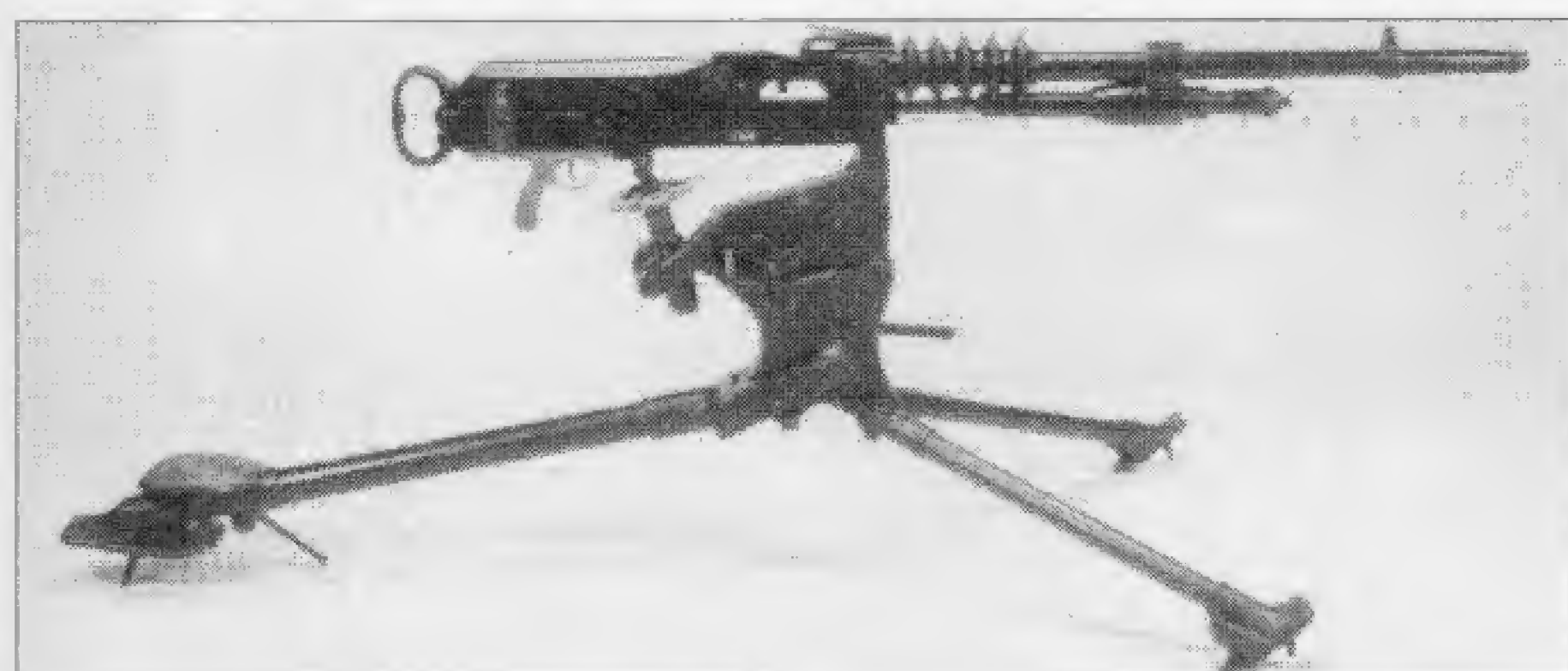
**Joe Berton** has long been a master of the 54mm vignette. Throughout the 1970s and '80s, Joe's vignettes were consistently among the most acclaimed in North American modelling circles. His entry at the 1988 Chicago Show, 'Battle of the Pyramids', captured the excitement of his earlier work. The well engineered interaction of the two figures (a tricky problem) is the key to the appeal of this impressive vignette. There is a wonderful flair and sense of daring in the work of many French modellers, typified by **Herve de Belenet's** 'Khmer War Elephant'. The brilliantly designed and painted arch, combined with the stunningly rendered elephant, make this a piece with impact. Among its honours was a second place at the 1991 Sèvres Competition. The ever-popular three figure vignette has never been handled more boldly than in **Peter Twist's** MFCA Best of Show winner, 'Cold Steel', a 90mm scratchbuilt vignette from 1983.

One of Grand Master **Shepherd Paine's** numerous show stoppers is 'A Stillness at Appomattox', a rarely seen box diorama from 1988. The dejection clearly evident in the countenance of General Robert E. Lee as he awaits the arrival of General Grant is very moving. The staging here is particularly good, as the two 'supporting actors' are animated to tell the viewer of the imminent arrival of the other key player in the drama. Shep's ability to tell a story through a combination of excellent engineering, construction, modelling and painting, but especially meticulously planned and carefully executed composition (or stage managing as Shep like to call it) is truly dazzling, as can be seen.

These are but a small sampling of the 120 outstanding miniatures pictured in *Military Model Showcase*. In fact, the most difficult thing about assembling the book was limiting the number of pictures to only 120! There are so many fine miniatures being created today that almost any combination could have been impressive. The one great consolation for the author was the knowledge that... well... there's always the next one! **MI**



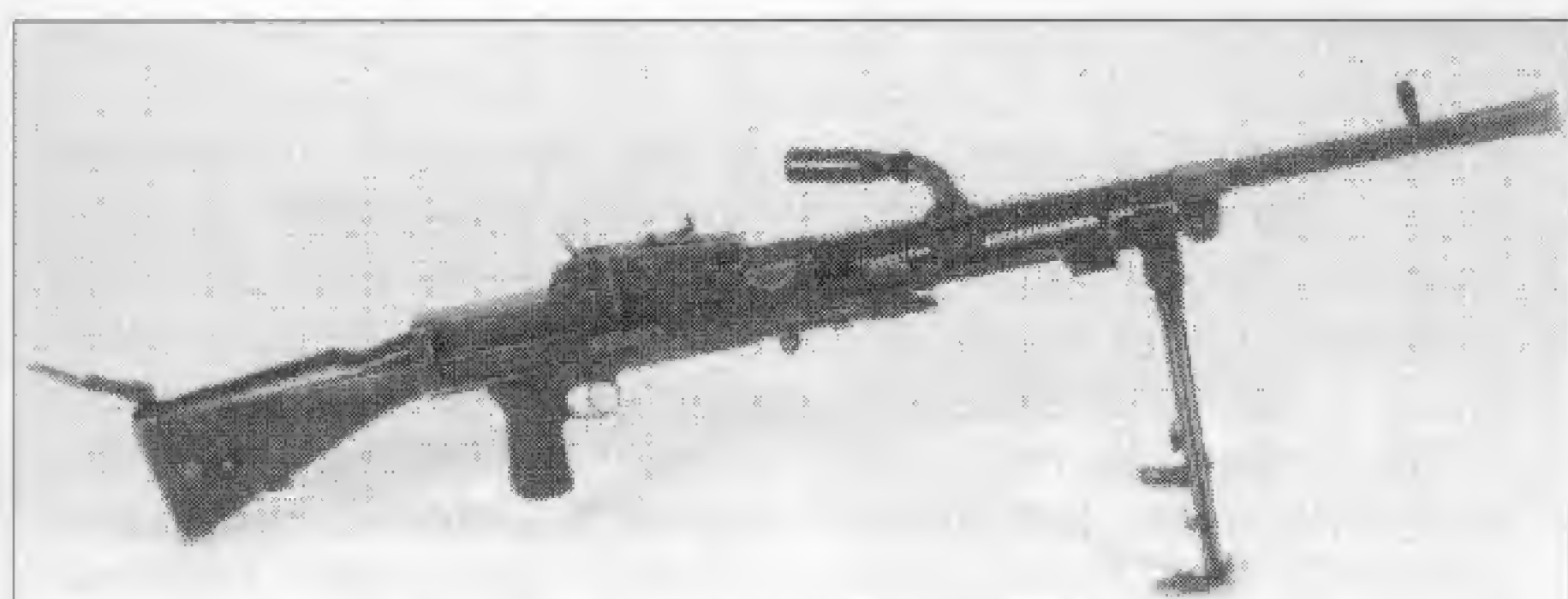
# WIN A GENUINE BREN GUN!



A



B



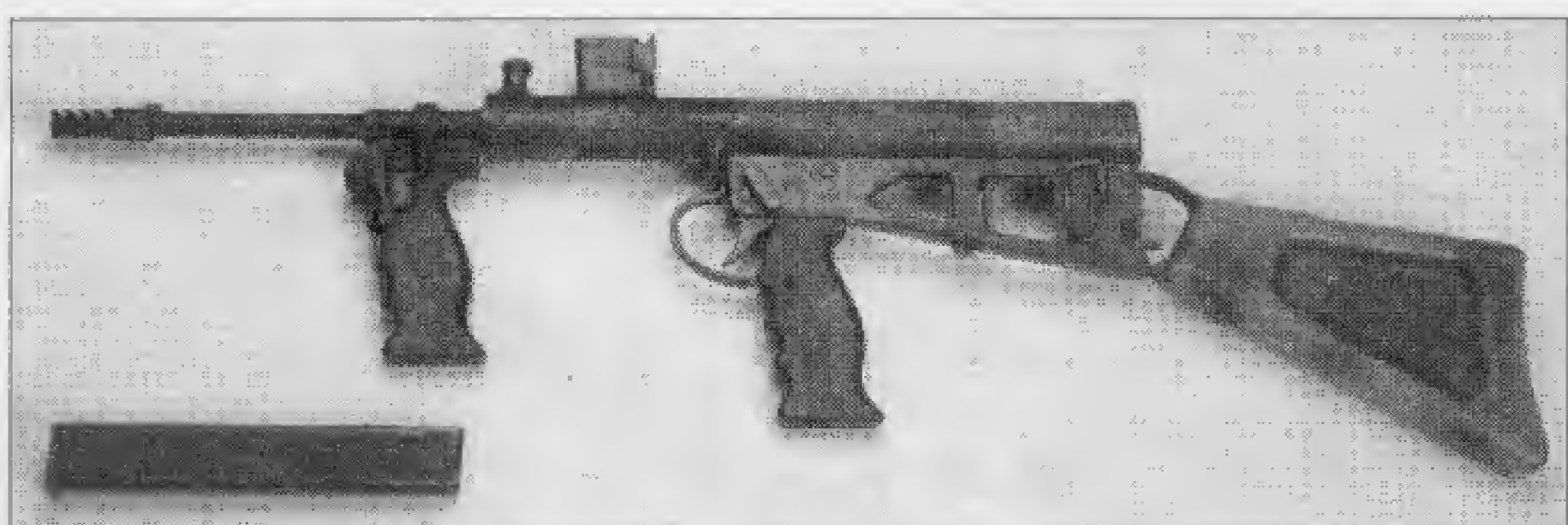
C



D



E



F



**MANTON INTERNATIONAL ARMS**, the leading Birmingham dealers, have reserved for one of our readers an original Second World War Bren light machine-gun. The weapon is in perfect working order but deactivated in compliance with Home Office requirements so no licence is needed.

The most famous light-machine-gun in the world, the Bren was based on a Czech design rechambered to take .303in ammunition, and was officially introduced into service in August 1938. Its incredible accuracy even on full automatic made it one of the most successful infantry smallarms of the century, and it still continues in service for training purposes. Both robust and incredibly easy to field strip, it is the weapon which many servicemen remember with the greatest affection. Now, thanks to **Manton International Arms**, one of these superb weapons can be yours!

The two runners-up will each receive a copy of the magnificent recent Windrow & Greene publication *Zulu*, autographed by Ian Knight, the author, and artists Mike Chappell and Angus McBride. There will also be five third prizes of military prints suitable for framing.

## How to enter

Study the accompanying six photographs labelled A-F and the answers on the coupon, and simply put them in what you think is the correct order (ie, if you think answer 3 belongs with photo B, write 'B' in the space alongside number 3). There will be another set of questions in the May issue. Clip or photocopy the coupons in both issues and send them to: 'Competition, Military Illustrated, 36 Gannet Lane, Wellingborough, Northants NN8 4NW', to arrive no later than 1 July 1993. Overseas readers should use airmail postage.

## The rules

The competition is open to all readers EXCEPT employees of Military Illustrated Ltd and their immediate relatives. Only entries arriving at our offices on or before 1 July 1993 will be valid. In all matters connected with the validity or correctness of entries the Editor's decision will be final. No correspondence can be entered into. The correct answers, and names of the winners, will be published in 'MI' No 64, September 1993.

**ENTRY COUPON (A):** Send with coupon (B) to: 'Competition, Military Illustrated Ltd, 36 Gannet Lane, Wellingborough, Northants NN8 4NW'.

1. 45 Colt M1911 .....
2. 9mm Radom wz 35.....
3. 9mm Owen Gun.....
4. 30 Springfield M1903 .....
5. 8mm Hotchkiss mle 1914 .....
6. .7.92mm ZB vz 26 .....

## Competitor's details:

Name.....

Address .....

Post Code .....Country .....



'DAWN TO DUSK'

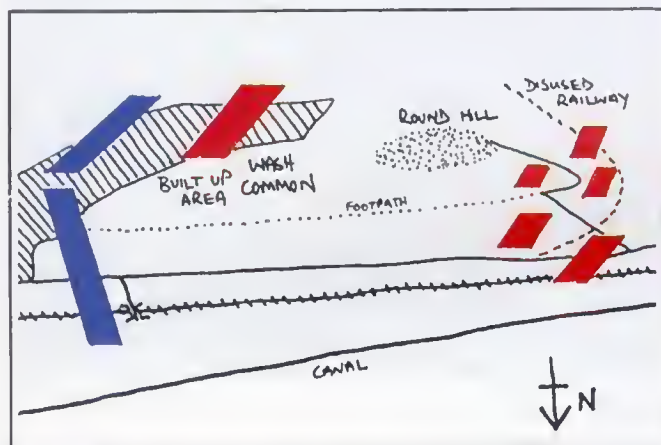
# Battlefields of the English Civil Wars Today



MIKE and JENNY McCORMAC

AN INTERNATIONAL flying competition — which they won — gave the McCormacs the opportunity to photograph several of the major English Civil War battlefields from the air.

**Stratton — Stamford Hill.** Stamford Hill is a small rise in the ground about 200 feet high to the north-west of the village of Stratton. There is a memorial to the battle on top of the hill. The earthworks defended by the Earl of Stamford and Sir James Chudleigh can still be discerned: they are in the centre of the picture, the position being marked by the roughly circular enclosure on top of the hill. The earthworks were based on an earlier encampment about 100 yards in diameter.



Stratton was a decisive victory for the Royalists. The Parliamentarians under the Earl of Stamford and Sir James Chudleigh held Stamford Hill north of Stratton. The Royalists under Sir Ralph Hopton advanced from all four sides of the hill, but without effect. By mid-afternoon they were running out of ammunition, so sim-

ply charged up the hill using pikes and swords. The result was that the Parliamentarians took fright, either running away or surrendering. Today the hill is tree covered, but it is still obviously a good defensive position, especially so as it is topped with a prehistoric earthwork.

**Newbury I — site of the battle from the north.** Since 1643 most of the Royalist position and some of the Parliamentarian position have had a housing estate built on them. Wash Common Farm still stands.



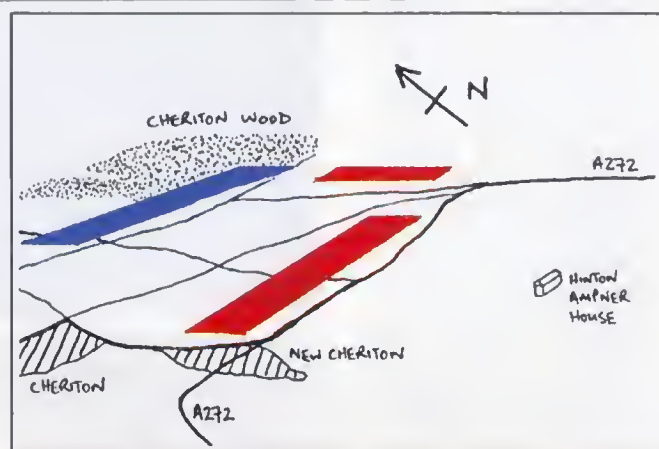


Newbury was the scene of two major battles; the first on the 20 September 1643 to the south-west of the town, and the second on 28 October 1644 to the north. Both sites have changed substantially as Newbury has expanded outwards, though the major features of both battlefields are still easy to discern from the air. The earlier action took place around Wash Common and Round Hill, the majority of the fighting taking place under what is now a housing estate. The later action took place near Donnington Castle around the bridge in Donnington. Again there has been considerable development, the A34 trunk road in particular cutting through the site. However, the castle and Shaw House, the King's headquarters at the time, are easy to locate.



**Newbury II — Donnington Castle.** The fairly sparse remains of the 14th century Donnington Castle near Newbury stand on rising ground above the River Lamboume. The castle was besieged twice during the Civil Wars, on the second occasion heavy bombardment reducing it to ruin. Since 1644 a large wood has grown up to the east and west of the hill.

**Cheriton** was the scene of fighting between 6,000 Royalists under Sir Ralph Hopton and 10,000 Parliamentarians under Sir William Waller on 29 March 1644. The Parliamentarians took up position just to the north of what is today the A272, whilst the Royalists took up position along a ridge to their north. During the fighting Hopton's forces fell into disarray, and retreated to Basing House. The site itself is probably little changed since 1644. Sir William Waller stayed at Hinton Ampner House the night before the battle; the house is owned today by the National Trust.



**Cheriton — site of the battle from the south-west.** The battlefield is a part of Hampshire probably little changed since 1644. Cheriton Wood's south-western corner has probably been cleared by modern farming. The majority of the fighting took place in the area to the north (left) of the A272, the east of Cheriton village, the south (right) of the lane leading to Cheriton Wood, and the west of the wood.



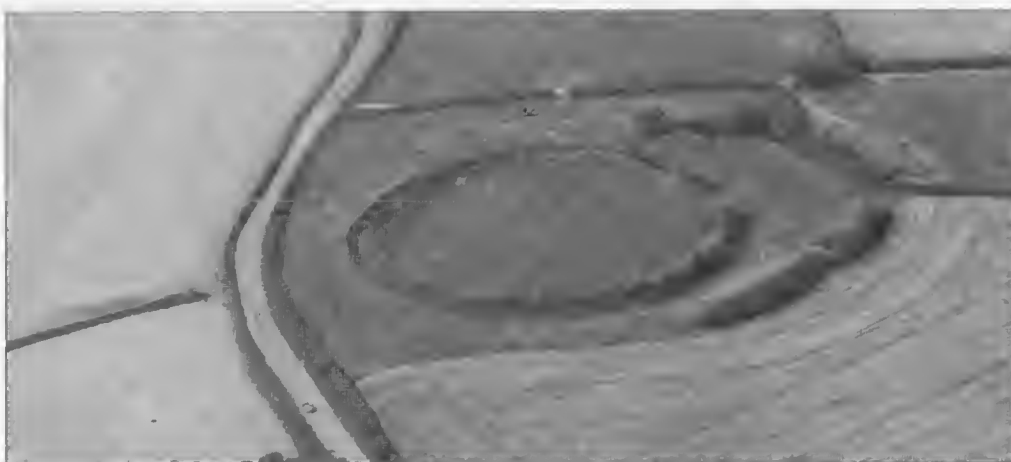




**Cheriton — Hinton Ampner House.** *Sir William Waller spent the night before the battle at Hinton Ampner House. For the battle itself, he arranged his artillery along the edge of the road to the northern edge of the property. The house itself was remodelled by the late Ralph Dutton in 1936, then was gutted by fire in 1960 and had to be remodelled and rebuilt. Today it is owned by the National Trust.*



**Lostwithiel — Restormel Castle.** *During the action around Lostwithiel in 1644 the Parliamentarians under the Earl of Essex occupied Restormel Castle until driven out by Sir Richard Grenville on 21 August. The castle's position meant that they should have been able to hold out for some considerable time; the fact that they evacuated without a fight says a lot about their morale at this period of the Wars.*



**Lostwithiel — Castle Dore.** *There is a small Iron Age hill fort with a roughly circular internal area protected by two banks and ditches, the outer bank being extended on the east side to make it oval in plan. On 2 September 1644, as the Earl of Essex's men tried to escape southwards from Lostwithiel, they occupied the earthworks. They held the position all day, but after dark were surrounded and eventually gave way to the Royalists.*

**Zulu: Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift, 22-23 January 1879;** by Ian Knight, with colour plates by Michael Chappell and Angus McBride; ISBN 1-872004-23-7; 136pp; 150 photos & maps, 8 colour plates; £35; deluxe leatherbound and signed limited edn of 250 copies, £65.

Of all the campaigns of the Victorian era, the Zulu War of 1879 continues to exert the greatest popular appeal. Whether this arises from the splendid cinematic account of Rorke's Drift, or from the very concept of a small force of redcoats fighting to the end against overwhelming numbers of a brave and skillful enemy, which seems to exemplify the colonial wars, the lure of the Zulu War is irresistible to many.

Equally irresistible to those interested in the period, or in the British Army in general, is this superb new publication. The author, Ian Knight, is an acknowledged expert in the field who has recently produced an excellent history of the whole Zulu War, and his command of the subject and thorough personal knowledge of the terrain over which the campaign was fought is evident throughout this latest work.

Unlike many histories of the war, *Zulu* concentrates in depth upon two actions fought within hours of each other, representing one of the highest and one of the lowest points of British military prestige in the later Victorian era. On 22 January 1879 the camp of the British expeditionary force in Zululand was left in possession of Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Pulleine of the 1st Battalion, 24th Foot, with five companies of his battalion, one of the 2nd Battalion, artillery and auxiliaries. This force was attacked and annihilated by a huge Zulu army; together with Maiwand it was the most serious reverse suffered by British arms in the period. However, the disaster was somewhat overshadowed by the following heroic defence of the mission station of Rorke's Drift on 22-23 January, when 'B' Company of the 2/24th and others held at bay another large Zulu force, winning eleven Victoria Crosses in the process.

*Zulu* describes these events in detail, but is much more than just an account of two famous actions: much of the historic background is charted, and a great deal of eyewitness 'human interest' is present in details of the participants and their accounts of events. Unlike some 19th century works, full justice is given to the 'enemy', with equal coverage of the Zulu army and its leaders, which by any standards was a most remarkable force. (When Charles Callwell wrote his book *Small Wars* in 1896 he identified the Zulus as the 'exceptionally brave savages' who were the only ones not to flinch from European cold steel.)

It is difficult to reconstruct the events of a battle in which one side



# BOOK REVIEWS

was virtually annihilated and the other was not in the habit of keeping written records, but fortunately not all the inhabitants of the Isandlwana camp were slaughtered, despite the pursuit of fugitives which is also chronicled in *Zulu*: none other than Horace Smith-Dorrien was the most distinguished survivor, fortunately for the BEF of 1914 [See *M1/52*.] The accounts of such survivors, and the memories of African participants recorded in later years, are utilised to present an admirably clear account of the events of Isandlwana, and Rorke's Drift is treated similarly.

There is also a most interesting account of the aftermath, including the discovery of the dreadful battlefield with its appalling sights and pathetic relics, and the disposal of the remains of the conflict.

Those familiar with the previous productions by this publisher (*The Thin Red Line* and *Into the Valley of Death*) will find that the quality of *Zulu* is equally fine, with superb colour plates by Michael Chappell and Angus McBride, and profuse black-and-white illustrations which include many rare and memorable contemporary images. Although the price is not inconsiderable, it represents excellent value.

There is much in *Zulu* which will surprise and fascinate the reader, nothing more than Garnet Wolseley's objections to the award of VCs for Rorke's Drift, to men who were 'shut up in buildings [and] could not bolt, and fought like rats for their lives which they could not otherwise save'. Fortunately, history has been more generous to the combatants of both sides, as proven by this splendid book which will become an indispensable reference, and which is recommended without reservation.

**Military Lessons of the Gulf War** edited by Bruce W. Watson. Greenhill Books; ISBN 1-85367-136-3; 272pp; 16pp mono plates plus maps & diagrams; appendices & index; £8.95 (p/bk).

When it first appeared in hardback in the autumn of 1991, this masterfully researched book — whose contributors from four nations were all involved in the Gulf War in an official capacity of one sort or another — was received with acclaim. Obviously, in the following 18 months several other books on the subject have appeared, including Norman Schwarzkopf's and Sir Peter de la Billière's own accounts, and although *Military Lessons of the Gulf War* has now been revised and expanded, the basic text and conclusions have well stood the test of time.

It is not a chronological account of the war, but instead divided into four main sections — Diplomacy, Force Deployments and the War, Specific Military Factors, and

Consequences of the War. Within those sections are sub-sections on, for example, the air war, the ground war, naval operations, command and control, electronic warfare, intelligence, logistics, etc.

One of the book's principal conclusions, as we have certainly seen since it went to press, is that '...wars with limited military aims do not necessarily solve the root political problems that brought them about. Thus, the Gulf War objective of liberating Kuwait was achieved, but it has not removed the underlying source of the aggression': ie, Saddam Hussein.

Among military conclusions the authors submit that 'we must reconsider the conventional wisdom that air power is not enough to win wars'; that 'blockades are of limited military value'; that 'EW investment had been well worth the money'; similarly, that 'spending in high-tech weapons had been worthwhile' but that the intelligence community — which never succeeded in locating Saddam — should look to its laurels; that 'the war reaffirmed the value of special forces'; and, perhaps most significantly, that the United States must abandon the 'wasteful, pernicious, destructive competition' between the four main military branches.

This is overall a sober, well-corroborated analysis which will be read with interest by all students of modern warfare. The appendices giving orbat for each of the nations involved are an additionally useful feature.

**The Achaemenid Persian Army by Duncan Head with colour plates by Rick Scollins.** Montvert Publications; ISBN 1-874101-0-0; 80pp; 8pp colour plates, mono line drawings throughout; bibliography; £8.75.

This first book from Philip Greenough's new publishing company augurs well for the future. The series — similar in format to Osprey's 'Men-at-Arms' — will, according to the publisher, analyse the history, dress, equipment and organisation of various ancient and mediaeval armies. Certainly few authors can claim as much competence in this period as Duncan Head, so long a key figure in the Society of Ancients. What is tragic is that this is the last book Rick Scollins illustrated, and his talent as well as his ebullient personality will be greatly missed by publishers as well as readers.

The book's text, which covers the Persian Empire from the 6th to the 4th centuries BC, is well researched and documented, while Christopher Rothero's line illustrations help bring the descriptions to life. It covers military organisation, Persian and Median costume, both Iranian and foreign troop types, and describes the army on campaign and in battle. In addition,

there are some useful orbat. A very attractive, well written and well produced book; we look forward with interest to further titles.

**The US Civil War Military Machine** by Ian Drury and Tony Gibbons. Dragon's World; ISBN 1-85028-131-9; 192pp; colour artworks throughout; index; £25.00

Subtitled 'Weapons and Tactics of the Union and Confederate Armed Forces', this very impressive book with full-colour paintings by Tony Gibbons on practically every page will have particular appeal to wargamers but should be of equal fascination to anyone interested in the American Civil War. It is a lavish production at a very reasonable price but the text is far removed from the usual conception of a 'coffee table' book, containing an enormous amount of well organised information.

There are sections — most covering several pages — on land and naval warfare, with 'aerial view' depictions of engagements and sieges, illustrations and descriptions of tactical formations, and further sections on pistols, muskets and rifles, carbines and machine-guns, field and siege artillery, railroads, balloons, mines, torpedoes, wagon trains, warships and naval ordnance; and much more, including weapon specification tables. Ian Drury, a professional historian with several other books under his belt, has found an ideal colleague in artist Tony Gibbons, both of whom are to be congratulated in accomplishing a daunting project so professionally, one which ideally complements their earlier *1400 Days: The US Civil War, Day by Day* (also published by Dragon's World).

**Osprey Elite series: each 64pp, approx, 50 mono illu., 12 colour plates; p/bk; £7.99**

**E44 Security Forces in Northern Ireland 1969-92** by Tim Ripley, plates by Mike Chappell

The text includes a potted history of the current troubles, and brief analyses of PIRA, INLA and the 'Loyalist' terrorist groups as well as longer sections on the RUC, the UDR, the Irish Republic's security forces and the bulk of the book — the British Army in Northern Ireland organisation, tactics, equipment, intelligence, etc. The photos are a good selection, mostly showing uniforms and equipment including the most common vehicles. Mr Chappell's plates cover all the uniformed forces, giving a good range of subjects over the 20-year development of uniforms and personal equipment; the commentaries seem to this reviewer to be a little 'loose', general rather than specific in tone and nomenclature. Nevertheless, this is a good introduction to the subject.

**E45 Armies of the Gulf War** by Gordon Rottman, plates by

Ron Volstad

The text contains an enormous amount of specific information, in national chapters on the US, British, French, Arab and Iraqi forces involved. The organisation, identity, and equipment of all these formations and units is summarised concisely, the text is, in effect, an expanded and annotated 'orbat'. The long and detailed commentaries to the rich selection of subjects crammed in to the colour plates give a great deal of information on uniforms, insignia and personal equipment: 47 figures and half-figures in all, plus patches and background details, in Mr Volstad's usual clean and confidently detailed style. The photos vary in quality of reproduction, but many are useful and interesting. A recommended addition to any Gulf War bookshelf.

**A Collector's Guide to Air Memorabilia** by Bruce Robertson. Ian Allan; ISBN 0-7110-2088-4; 144pp; mono illu. throughout; £9.95.

Following the success of his earlier books *Aviation Archaeology* and *Epics of Aviation Archaeology* published in the 1970s, veteran writer Bruce Robertson returns to the subject with this new guide to collecting just about any form of aeronautical memorabilia imaginable — from log books and combat reports to actual aircraft. The format is the same as Robin Lumsden's book *The Black Corps* (reviewed *M1/54*), the small typeface unfortunately making it difficult to read, Ian Allan please note.

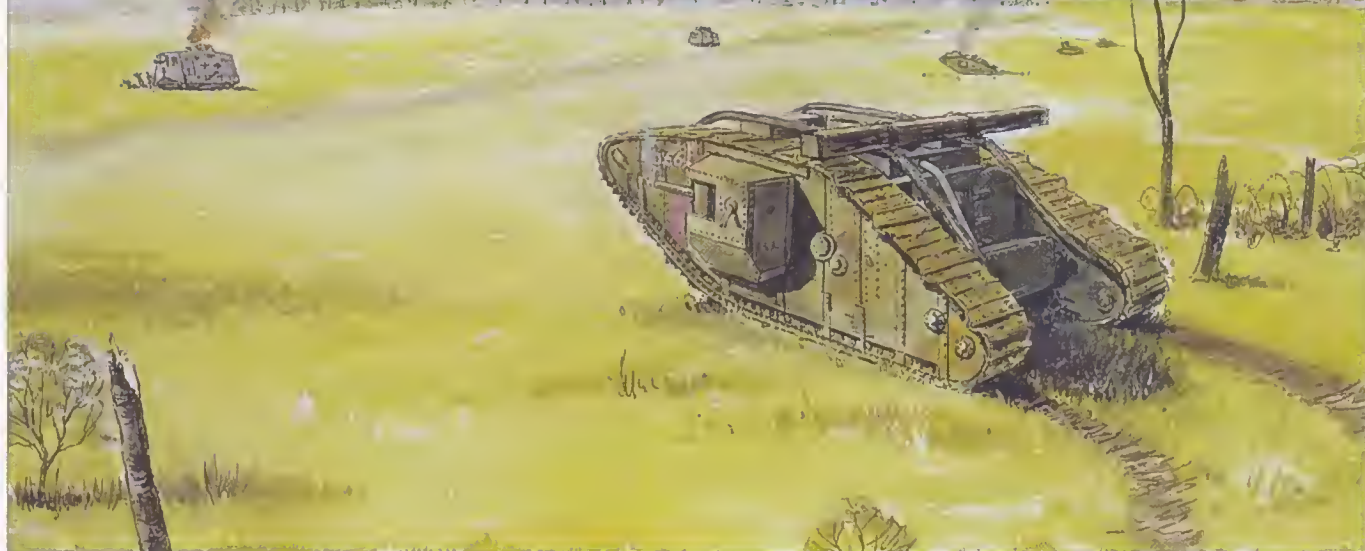
For 'M1' readers the most useful sections will probably be those on uniforms and dress, flying clothing and equipment, medals, medals and badges. However, for those whose interests range further, there are also sections on aviation art, books and magazines, service publications, logs and reports, photographs, recognition material, aircraft accessories, emergency, escape and survival equipment, model aircraft and model figures such as Britain's. One rather strange omission is motor transport.

Each section is well planned and the author gives much useful advice on collecting systematically, pointing out some of the pitfalls for the unwary and describing the buying and selling procedures at auctions. Prices are discussed in general rather than specific terms but the book does show how the right selective approach can result in a collection of historical value without breaking the bank.

The book is well illustrated although obviously in just 144 pages the photographs can only show a tiny selection of the huge amount of material available. Overall, a useful beginner's guide but still leaving scope for a much more detailed treatment.



# The First Tank Battle



THERE ARE CERTAIN dates in military history that remain fixed in the mind as being of fundamental importance. April 26 1918 is probably not one of them, yet what happened on that date, on an unremarkable piece of French farmland, was the precursor to numerous subsequent actions which have in turn introduced a level of technology to warfare that would have been incomprehensible in 1918.

On that date, the first recorded action between two armoured fighting vehicles occurred. One was a Mk IV Male tank, No 4066, of the 1st Tank Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Frank Mitchell, the other an A7V, named 'Nixe', of

## MARTIN PEGLER Paintings by RAY NEWELL

A VARIETY OF weapons have changed the face of warfare over the last century, but on land surely the most significant has been the tank. Here we look back to 26 April 1918 and the first face-to-face encounter between British and German armour...

Abteilung 2, commanded by Wilhelm Biltz.

### THE BACKGROUND

By early 1918, the war had broken out of the trenches, and had at last become a battle of movement. The use of tanks since 1916 had been largely sporadic, wasteful and up to the battle of Cambrai of only localised tactical use. Cambrai,

although badly mismanaged, had at least given the Tank Corps an opportunity to prove what could be done by good planning, effective artillery support and surprise. Up until then, its future had been in some doubt. What the tank had done, which had proved impossible previously, was break the stranglehold of barbed wire and Maxim guns. The infantry could

*This watercolour by Ray Newell depicts Mitchell's tank in the final stages of the engagement at Cachy. 'Nixe' has been hit, and the crew are abandoning her. Mitchell's Mk IV is equipped with the wooden unditching beam, and 'spuds' on the tracks to give extra grip. The rear escape hatch is ajar to permit fumes to disperse, a practice only allowed when enemy infantry were not present.*

now attack objectives over flattened wire, whilst machine-guns wasted their energies on the plated hides of machines, rather than the khaki ones of men. After four long years, the field-grey carpet was being rolled back, although it must be said, not with ease.

If understanding of tank tactics had come slowly to the General Staff, it had also been a learning experience for the tank commanders themselves. The wasteful trait of individual vehicles acting on their own had been largely abandoned in favour of tanks working in twos and threes, providing cover for each other. One Male working with one or two Females could give a good account of themselves against all but the most determined artillery — the Males dealing with entrenched machine-guns, etc, and Females sorting out infantry and lightly protected machine-guns.

The German soldiers, far from being cowed by the increased use of tanks, had learned to fight back, and tackled them with determination. Contrary to popular belief, tanks were not bullet-proof. Very close range machine-gun fire

**Left:** Sergeant J.R. McKenzie, from a photograph taken in late 1917. (Private collection.)

'Hagen' and 'Wotan' at Villers-Brettonneux. (Imperial War Museum.) **Right:** Lieutenant Frank Mitchell, MC. A photograph taken at the end of the war. He wears a standard officer's service tunic, with Tank Corps buttons and collar dogs. Interestingly, he still wears cuff rank insignia. (Private collection.)







could heat hull plates up to a point where they glowed red and softened. The issue of 'K' armour-piercing 7.92mm small-arms ammunition enabled the infantrymen to disable a vehicle with accurate shooting. In addition, the issue of the 13mm T. Gehwehr anti-tank rifle gave the German troops a potent, if unwieldy, weapon. Other methods of attack involved placing bundles of stick grenades under the tracks, which was risky but effective, and attacking the vehicle from behind, concentrating fire on the fuel tanks. A burning tank was usually abandoned with haste by the crew, whose fate in the midst of a storm of gunfire was usually sealed. Flame-throwers proved particularly effective against tanks, although getting close enough to use one required strong nerves.

### THE MACHINES

By 1918, the Mk IV was a combat veteran, and was about to be superseded by the Mk V, with its long-overdue epicyclic gearbox, permitting the driver to operate the vehicle on his own. Mitchell's Mk IV, numbered 4066 (but not apparently named), was appropriately No 1 Tank of No 1 Section of 'A' Company, 1st Tank Battalion. (Full specifications for the Mk IV can be found in *M1/40*). It was, Mitchell recalled, 'an old tank, overhauled and patched up' for losses had been heavy during the Germans' March offensive. Nevertheless, it ran reliably enough, and its complement of two 6pdr Hotchkiss guns and three Lewis guns was still a potent force.

In addition to the Mk IV 'heavies', a new light tank had just been introduced. The Medium Mark A, named the Whippet, had a normal crew of three, weighed 14 tons and could travel at an eye-watering 8mph. Although no match for the firepower of A7Vs, or captured Mk IVs, the Whippet was competent enough in its role of infantry and supply line harassment; indeed, on 26 March 1918, at Mailly-Maillet, 12 were credited with the destruction of a force of 300 German infantrymen, in the role for which they were designed.

Working with the heavy tanks, the Whippets could force emerging infantry to seek cover, whilst leaving the Mk IVs and Mk Vs to seek out the more dangerous targets. The tactics were not foolproof, but they sufficed.

The Germans had not been resting on their laurels since Cambrai. They realised, albeit belatedly, that armoured vehicles were not a temporary men-

tal aberration on the part of the British High Command, and any lingering doubts they may have had about the usefulness of the tank had been dispelled by the breakthrough at Cambrai. At the behest of the Kriegs-department work was started in October 1916 on a vehicle that would be able to meet the Mk IV on equal terms. Exactly what the rationale was behind the final design is difficult to determine, for the new tank, mind bogglingly called the *Kraftfahrversuchskompagnie*, possessed all the faults of the British marks, plus a few new ones that appeared to be solely the product of a peculiar German logic. It resembled a pointed iron box on wheels, with low sprung tracks, high centre of gravity and bodywork that reached almost to the ground. This combination ensured that its trench crossing capabilities were minimal, and that it was dangerously unstable on rough ground, with a ten-

*Mk IV Male 'Egbert' of 'E' Battalion demonstrating trench crossing techniques. The Lewis guns have been removed from the sponsons. (Private collection.)*

dency to roll onto its side on steep inclines. In addition, it had a towering silhouette that made artillery spotters weep for joy. As if this were not sufficient handicap, it had six machine-guns, but possessed only one forward firing, 57mm Sokol gun, with very limited lateral traverse. To engage a target other than directly ahead, the vehicle had to be manoeuvred into position by the crew, who comprised no less than 18 individuals drawn from the army, artillery and machine-gun corps. This did not lead to easy co-operation within the confines of the tank, and caused considerable logistical nightmares. For all of its problems, the A7V was an imposing piece of hardware, standing 10ft 10in



*Leutnants Wilhelm Biltz and Friedrich Bitter. (Mittler Verlag, Herford.)*





'Hagen' and 'Wotan' at Villers-Brettonneux. (Imperial War Museum.)

high, 10ft wide and 26ft 3in long and weighing 33 tons. British anti-tank weapons were negligible; only aimed artillery was able to knock out such behemoths. Demands of wartime production meant that production of the A7V was slow, and much use was made of captured British tanks. Against this background, the protagonists were set to face each other in combat.

### THE ACTION

The air was still and cold outside Villers Brettonneux on the morning of 24 April 1918. Thin plumes of smoke rose from the shallow trenches of the sheltering British troops. In a gas drenched wood at Bois l'Abbé, the three tanks of 'A' Coy, 1st Tank Battalion, waited for an impending German assault. The crews of the vehicles (two Females and one Male, all Mk IVs) were exhausted and uncomfortable, having worn gas masks for most of the night. As they dozed, a sudden rush of shells crashed down, spewing high explosive and more gas into the air. British artillery replied, and figures blundered past in the murky undergrowth. Several of the crew were suffering from serious gas inhalation, and two of the Male's crewmen were led to the rear, coughing and purple-faced. An infantry Brigadier appeared with the Section Commander, Captain J.C. Brown, MC, and informed the section leaders that the German attack had recaptured Villers Brettonneux and created a salient at Cachy, located on a piece of high ground that domi-

nated Amiens. If it were lost, the enemy could drive a wedge between the British and French lines. 'A' Company's orders were explicit: 'Proceed to Cachy switch-line and hold it at all costs'.

The commander of the sole Male tank, 22-year-old Lieutenant Frank Mitchell, was already an experienced soldier. Typical of many well-educated, middle-class young men, he had the added advantages of two years service in the ranks, and more than his fair share of nerve and resourcefulness, as well as a sound understanding of the limiting factors involved in using tanks against a determined enemy.

His crew, now down from eight to five men, struggled into the tank, whilst the two Females divided their fit men between themselves. All crewmen were affected by the gas, and had red, swollen, streaming eyes, but despite this, they succeeded in getting the engines started and the vehicles moved. Out of the wood, the tanks headed towards a barrage so dense that Mitchell recalled 'it seemed impossible that we could pass through unhit, and I decided to attempt a zig-zag course'. Amazingly, all three vehicles remained unscathed, but there was still no sign of the enemy.

Inside 4066, Mitchell and his crew cringed as armour-piercing bullets from German machine-guns punched through the plating and ricocheted around the cab, clanging on the engine cover. A Lewis gunner collapsed as a round pierced both legs, whilst around Mitchell's vehicle, shells rained down as enemy artillery tried frantically to knock out the Mk IVs.

The tanks rolled forward, engines chuffing, as their commanders searched the land ahead. A British infantryman suddenly popped out of a trench in front of Mitchell, and yelled, 'Look out, Jerry tanks about'. Mindful of snipers, Mitchell pushed his loophole open and saw what appeared to be a small cottage in front of him. Blinking hard, he realised that it was a German tank. He yelled a warning to his gunners, who slammed 6 pdr armour-piercing shells into the breeches of their guns, then crouched tensely, peering through the jerking telescopic sights as the enemy tank closed.

Leutnant Wilhelm Biltz in the commander's cupola of 'Nixe' had not had an auspicious start to the day. The vehicle had been plagued by mechanical problems, and had set off considerably later than its sister tank, 'Elfriede', eventually leaving at about 9.00am and heading for Cachy in thick fog. Biltz was unable to maintain his course, and as the fog lifted he realised he was further north than planned.

The low silhouettes of the British tanks, almost lost in the debris thrown up by artillery fire, did not catch his eye for a while, despite the flurry of shells being fired at them by Mitchell. Once spotted, Biltz wasted no time in ordering his gunners to open fire and was delighted to see Mitchell's tank stop. Believing it to have been disabled, Biltz's 57mm gunner turned his attention to the two Females.

Whether Biltz's gunner actually hit the Females is a moot point, for the artillery was still pounding the area round the Mk IVs, but it is likely that the rapid

shooting of 'Nixe's' guns were the cause of the sudden retreat of the pair, both seriously holed and now vulnerable to the intense machine-gun fire aimed at them. Within minutes, the Male was on its own. In turning his attention to the Females, whose light armament could not have inflicted any damage on him, Biltz had committed a serious, but understandable, error.

As the British tanks headed towards Cachy, Mitchell looked out of a side loophole to find the two Females limping back to the British lines, jagged holes in their sides from shellfire. A storm of bullets struck the front of 4066, causing the crew to drop to the floor, splattering Mitchell and his driver, with steel splash. Conditions in the tank were becoming distinctly unpleasant, as Mitchell later noted. 'The roar of our engine, the nerve wracking rat-tat-tat of our machine-guns... and the thunderous boom of the 6 pounders, all bottled up in that narrow space filled our ears... added to this we were half stifled by the fumes of petrol and cordite.'

Despite their best efforts, the gunners on the big Hotchkiss could not hit 'Nixe' from the jolting confines of their sponsons, so Mitchell took a calculated risk. He ordered the driver to halt, leaving them a sitting target for both the German artillery and the 57mm gun of 'Nixe'. In the left sponson a tough Scot, Sergeant McKenzie, sat with his left eye clamped to the sight (his right being so swollen with gas as to be useless). The cessation of movement was a godsend. Sighting carefully, he fired, the empty case crashing against the engine



casing behind him.

A sudden shower of earth and splinters rattled against the hull of 'Nixe', as a cloud of grey smoke drifted from McKenzie's 6 pdr. Before Biltz could react, a deafening explosion filled the cabin with smoke and acrid fumes. Mitchell's gamble had paid off, and a shell had struck the front nearside, slightly left of the 57mm gun, instantly killing the gunner Reiske, mortally wounding Schütze Janz and Gefreiter Gutzat and injuring several other crew. Two other hits in rapid succession did little apparent damage, but the Leutnant frantically ordered reverse. Biltz had no idea of the state of the vehicle, or crew, but could hear yells and cries through the choking smoke. He had other concerns as well. In the forward compartment were stacked boxes of live hand grenades — if these were on fire, then the inside of the vehicle would become a charnel house.

Ordering an immediate evacuation, the crew tumbled out into the raking fire from Mitchell's Lewis guns, although amazingly all reached cover unscathed. When 'Nixe' failed to catch fire, Biltz ordered them to remount, and retreat. In fact, it ground to a halt after only a few hundred yards, the oil tanks holed by a shell from McKenzie's gun.

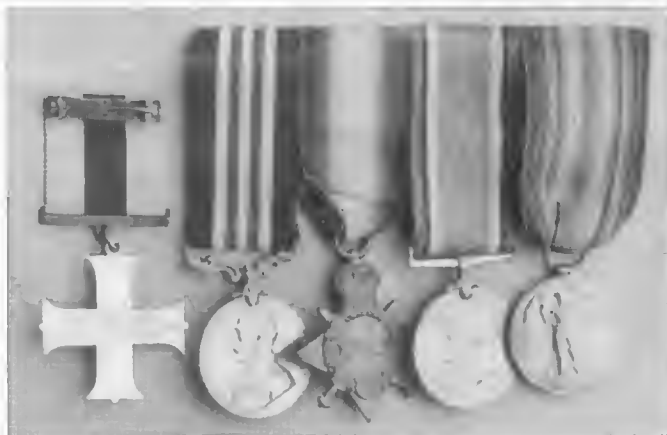
In the hot confines of his tank, Mitchell shouted encourage-

ment to his Sergeant as shot after shot struck the A7V. The wave of elation that he felt as 'Nixe's' crew abandoned her was soon crushed as two other A7Vs crept forward. (These were most likely 'Siegfried' and 'Schnuk'). Both 6 pdrs were now firing as fast as they could when, to Mitchell's relief, the leading German tank suddenly went into reverse, followed seconds later by the other. As if on cue, a section of Whippet light tanks hove into view, scattering the following German infantry and mowing down those not fast enough to escape.

With his crew exhausted, and low on ammunition, their tank the target for every artillery piece in the vicinity, Mitchell ordered the driver to return to British lines. Then, from Villers Brettoneux, appeared a fourth A7V. Both sides opened rapid fire, but the clash was brief, the German tank vanishing into dead ground. Only 300 yards away from the British trenches, the Mk IV was finally struck by a shell from a light mortar, which blew a track off, causing the machine to circle crazily. Carrying their wounded gunner between them, the crew dashed for safety into the British lines.

For his part in the action, Frank Mitchell was awarded the Military Cross and Sergeant J.R. McKenzie the Military Medal.

Biltz's part in this action went unnoticed, and only the damage inflicted on 'Nixe' and casualties convinced his superiors of the honesty of the subsequent battle report; that two tanks had



met in head-to-head combat.

### THE CONCLUSION

The outcome of the fight between the tanks was inconclusive, and had no effect whatsoever on the course of the war, but by the end of 1918 lessons had been learned, particularly after a pitched battle on 8 October 1918 between A7Vs, captured British heavies and 12th Battalion Tank Corps. The sight of tanks manoeuvring for hull down or flank firing positions would become all too commonplace a little over two decades later.

In 1920, Mitchell, by way of a joke, applied to the War Office for Naval Prize Money, tanks having been first introduced by the Admiralty. As he had knocked out a German landship, he felt that under Naval regulations, he and his crew should be entitled to some remuneration. He eventually received a reply from the Financial Secretary of the War Office: 'It is regretted that your

Lieutenant Frank Mitchell's MC and Sergeant McKenzie's MM. (Peter Duffield and Private collection.)

claim for Prize Money... cannot be admitted, there being no funds available for the purpose of granting Prize Money in the Army.' The Army had the final word. **MI**

### Sources

All quotes by F. Mitchell extracted from *Tank Warfare*, republished by Spa Books and T. Donovan, 1987.

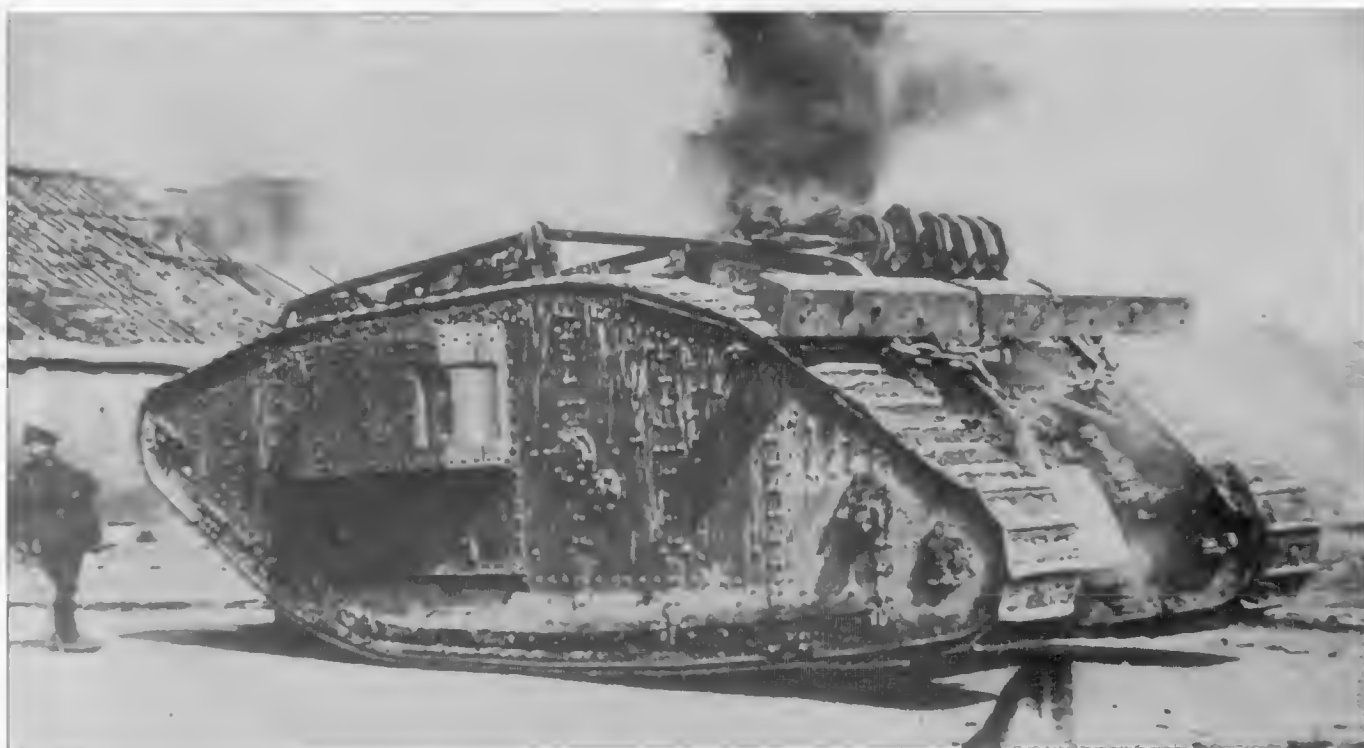
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### Acknowledgements

The author would particularly like to thank Mr P. Duffield for the loan of Frank Mitchell's medals and much relevant paperwork, and Mr Peter Scott, who generously gave the author the portrait of Frank Mitchell and several other related items. Also, Max Hundleby, author of *The German A7V Tank*. Photographs 3 and 4 appear courtesy of Haynes Foulis Publishing Ltd.

A Mk IV Female of the type driven off by shellfire during the Cacy engagement. (Tank Museum, Bovington.)





# Royal Canadian Naval Beach Commando 'W'

ERIC FINLEY and ED STOREY



**Above:** Close-up of RCN Beach Commando 'W' sleeve insignia. The CANADA flash is a Canadian-made melton, red lettering on Navy blue, version; the COMMANDO flash is a British-made melton example and the 'Combined Operations' patch is a British-made canvas version which

has been trimmed into a circle. (Public Archives of Canada.)

**Below:** LCI (L) # 125 laden with Canadians for the Normandy invasion. This is the same type of landing craft which took 'W' to Normandy in July 1944. (Public Archives of Canada.)

FINALLY, AFTER all the disappointments, they made it to Normandy... only to face more disappointment, because they were still not given a combat assignment. But inside themselves, the men of 'W' Commando know they would have acquitted themselves well.

AT ITS DEPARTURE from Cowes on the afternoon of 7 July 1944, LCI(L) #298 of Canada's 1st (ex-RN 260th) Flotilla had boarded seven officers and 52 ratings from 'W' for the trip to Normandy. The remaining personnel, being those who failed to return from leave on time, would not join their unit for several days. The following morning the commandos' advance party disembarked on Juno's 'Mike' beach near Courseulles and officially relieved RN Beach Commando 'P' which, having suffered casualties during and after Operation 'Neptune' (the seaborne portion of 'Overlord'), returned to the United Kingdom for regrouping the rest.

Regarding the rather sudden move to Normandy, 'W' Commando's CO commented: 'Fortunately no stores were required to be taken initially and this eased the strain of recall and embarkation. Arms, extra blankets, tents and a few other odd items were the only articles of stores brought. As "W" Commando's role has been and still is one of relief, it has taken over the equipment (from "P" Commando) as it has

taken over the beach.'

Throughout the first week, which coincided with the Allies' concentrated drive against Caen, frequent 'dog fights occurred over the beach area and protracted and intense air raids took place against the anchorage each night'. In spite of all this, 'W' managed to carry out its several tasks satisfactorily enough to prompt the local Army beach Group Commander to request that it not be replaced by 'P' Commando which had since returned to the United Kingdom.

Notwithstanding this request, on 18 July 1944, 'P' was reassigned to 'Mike' beach and 'W' took over from 'S' Commando on 'Nan' beach near Bernieres. During the ensuing four weeks at what was mainly a stores disembarkation area, 'W' apparently helped immeasurably in creating daily records for tons of stores and military vehicles off-loaded. Shortly afterwards, NOIC Juno put 'S' Commando in charge of both 'Mike' and 'Nan' beaches and scheduled 'W' for a 29 July return to the United Kingdom. However, it changed its mind and decided





to dispatch 'P' instead. Over the next three weeks, and particularly following the capture of Caen and Cherbourg, activity on Juno beaches gradually became routine.

On 22 August, after serving for almost seven weeks in the Juno Sector, 'W' Commando returned to Cowes and HMS Vectis (Pines Camp). From a statistical stand-point, it had spent 80% of its ten-month existence in training and 20% in operations. According to a Canadian naval history report dated December 1944/January 1945: 'The officers were almost all pleased at the prospect of general service again with its more consistent routine, but the ratings were universally disgruntled at being disbanded. They felt disappointment at not having been through the trial by fire of an assault landing for which they had been trained so ardently for so long.'

Although the Admiralty suggested sending 'W' to HMS Armadillo or HMS Dundonald, the Canadian authorities gave orders for 'W' as well as the three Canadian LC(L) flotillas to disband by the end of August 1944. Accordingly, and before new appointments could be made or leave granted, 'W' had first to assemble and prepare inventories of all arms, ammunition and stores, and then ensure that they were returned to their proper respective depots. On 30 August 1944 a final signal announced that 'paying off' details had been completed.

Meanwhile, a number of the RN Beach Commandos would continue to play vital operational roles on the coasts of Europe and South-East Asia right up until the surrender of Germany and Japan. In December 1945, Mounthatten advised the Admiralty that he concurred with the recommendation in the Allied Commander-in-Chief's report on Operation 'Overlord' of changing the title of Naval Beach Commando to Naval Beach Company. Three months later the Admiralty announced the abolition of the title Naval Beach Commando and its replacement by Naval Beach Control Party. Finally, we note that following the 1949 reorganisation of Combined

AB Armand Therien from Montreal poses wearing British Mk III helmet, British BD with melton insignia, British 1942 Pattern battle jerkin which has had the front pouches removed and replaced by 1937 Pattern pouches for the 50-round Lanchester SMG magazines. Weapon is a 9mm Lanchester with standard 1908 Pattern sling and 17-inch 1907 Pattern bayonet. (Public Archives of Canada.)

Operations, the Royal Marines assumed the role which had been played in World War II by such units as RCN Beach Commando 'W'.

#### Uniforms

The uniform worn by RCN Beach Commandos was supplied from British sources. Canadian items were those of Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) issue such as caps, balaclavas and sweaters. The British items are all what could be classified as 'Army' uniforms, although when used for Combined Operations they could best be considered as 'land element' equipment.

Head dress consisted of RCN caps or, when training in Scotland, British manufactured Mk II Helmets. For Normandy, Mk III Helmets were issued.

British-manufactured 1937 Pattern battledress tunics and trousers were issued and can be distinguished from the 1940 Pattern utility battledress by concealed pocket and waist buttons as well as tabs on the bottom of the trousers. The 1937 Pattern BD also employs flat brass buttons as opposed to the plastic versions on 1940 Pattern BD.



When training in Scotland, British manufactured ankle boots with web gaiters were worn. British-manufactured 'hightop' or 'invasion' boots were issued for Normandy.

#### Equipment and weapons

Like the uniforms, British manufactured 1937 Pattern Web was issued and used in training. For 'walking out' and some training periods, well scrubbed or whitened web belts with gaiters were worn. The gaiters are the later version with leather tabs. The webbing supplied was like that issued to the infantry excluding the

entrenching tool carrier with head and helve. The 1942 Pattern Battle Jerkin (M1/27 and /29) was issued for Normandy and worn by all members.

Small arms were a mixed assortment of British-manufactured and Lend-Lease weapons. Training appears to have been conducted with the American-manufactured World War I vintage P14 or P17 with the P1913 17-inch bayonet. For Normandy, .38 revolvers, 9mm Lanchester sub-machine guns, Number 4 Mark I\* Lee-Enfields, Bren light machine-guns and stripped



'W' Commando loaded aboard ICI (L) # 298 of the 260th Canadian Flotilla (previously 1st RN Flotilla). Note some of the men are wearing RCN Navy blue toques. (Public Archives of Canada.)





Ashore in Normandy, 'W' took over a former German gun bunker for their accommodation. These photos were taken in August 1944. (Public Archives of Canada.)

Lewis guns were used. The Lanchester, a distinctly Naval SMG, was supplied with the P1907 17-inch bayonet (the same type as used with the Number 1 Mark III Lee-Enfield) and special 1937 Pattern Web pouches for holding the 50-round magazines and one loading tool. The Lanchester magazine pouches could be stitched onto the 1942 Pattern battle jerkin by first removing the front two pouches.

Also issued prior to D-Day was the Fairbairn-Sykes Fighting Knife; a knife sometimes referred to as the 'Commando Dagger', and certainly an item which was the stock in trade of the Commandos.



#### Insignia

Only insignia worn on the battledress will be covered, and contemporary photographs reveal that the ratings wore RCN Caps with HMCS cap tallies. Officers wore RCN peaked caps with 'private purchase' wire officer's RCN badges. The officers badge was described as: 'In gilt, a fouled anchor on

an oval navy blue background; surrounded by laurels; surmounted by a GR VI crown. Extreme height: 3 inches; extreme width: 2 inches.

Like the COMMANDO flash, a Canadian manufactured curved CANADA flash with red letters embroidered on blue melton was issued. This flash was used to distinguish the

Canadians from the many other Commando units and was the standard badge worn on RCN uniforms.

Cloth shoulder flashes consisted of the following types: a British-manufactured curved COMMANDO flash with red letters embroidered on Navy blue melton. This flash was authorised in Scotland in 1943 at the beginning of the Commando course.

The 'Combined Operations' patch consisted of a red Thompson sub-machine-gun over an anchor and eagle embroidered on a Navy blue melton background shield. Each of these symbols represents the Army, Navy and Air force; and it should be noted that the anchor used on this patch is the type used by ships for sandy bottom anchorage and is different from that used on the RCN cap badges which is an anchor employed for rough rocky bottom anchorage. This British-manufactured patch came in two versions, melton and printed canvas. The patch was the standard shield shape as other navy trades' badges and came in facing pairs. RCN Commandos tended to remove the bottom por-

Interesting photo of one of the three 'W' Commando beach party groups sporting a vast and assorted amount of equipment. Most are wearing British Mk III helmets although an RAC helmet and what appear to be two US M1 helmets also feature. Weapons include Stens, Lewis LMG, Lanchesters and Lee Enfields while basic uniforms are British 1937 Pattern BD with 'High Top' invasion boots. (Public Archives of Canada.)





tion, producing a circular patch. This circular patch is generally associated with Army Commandos in their desire to change the original naval shape to something distinct; and no reason has been given why RCN Commandos performed this alteration.

Limited quantities of high quality officer's versions of the COMMANDO and CANADA flashes as well as the 'Combined Operations' patch were manufactured for private purchase. These badges employed silver wire lettering and design work on a Navy blue melton background and were used primarily on what can be considered 'best BD' for 'walking out' and periods of leave. This wire insignia gave the BD a much smarter appearance and made a noticeable distinction between the ratings and the officers.

A detailed description of RCN and RCNVR rank is out of the scope of this article, but suffice to say that rank insignia followed conventional RCN practice with officers wearing their rank on Navy blue shoulder boards which were attached to the shoulder straps of the BD tunic.

For the ratings, again conventional RCN practice was followed with red on navy blue melton backing rank insignia being worn on the sleeve. This insignia was of Canadian manufacture and did not come in printed canvas. **MI**

#### Note

Most of the text for this article is based upon a 71 page manuscript, entitled RCN Beach Commando 'W', written circa 1991 by E.G. Finley, a copy of which has been deposited in the Directorate of History, Department of National Defence, Ottawa, Canada.

We would like to thank the following institutions and individuals for their assistance in the preparation of this article: Department of National Defence — Directorate of History; Canadian War Museum; Public Archives of Canada; Loretta Storey. Ed Storey would also like to give a special thanks to Eric Gault Finley, without whose help this article would not have got off the ground. He very generously allowed me to use not only the photographs and information that he has collected but has also enthusiastically proof-read this article several times, which in itself must be a labour of love. Mr Finley has asked me to include a note of thanks to Captain Eric A. Turner, Royal Army Medical Corps, who operated on him in Normandy in July 1944 and probably saved his life. Mr Turner now lives in Birmingham and they both have since met each other in 1990.

## GALLERY



IN THE AUTUMN of 1941 the 8th Army stood on the frontier of Egypt and the encircled garrison at Tobruk was still holding on, being maintained by sea. General Cunningham was preparing an offensive timed for 18 November to relieve Tobruk and sweep the enemy out of Cyrenaica. It so happened that General Rommel was also secretly mounting an offensive, designed to eliminate Tobruk, and timed for 23 November, five days after the date set by General Auchinleck for the 8th Army.

In that same autumn, Lieutenant-Colonel Geoffrey Keyes, 11th Scottish Commando, who at the age of 24 was the youngest colonel in the British Army, had a 'great idea'. The idea was nothing less than an attempt by a small Commando force to destroy the German headquarters in Libya, 250 miles behind the enemy lines, and to capture Major-General Erwin Rommel, commander of the Afrika Korps. Where normally such an outrageous plan would be dismissed out-of-hand, the C-in-C Middle East, General Sir Claude Auchinleck, a firm believer in using unorthodox methods, sanctioned all sorts of irregular operations timed to dovetail with the offensive. And so GHQ Cairo gave its blessing to what was to become known as the Rommel Raid, timed for midnight, 17/18 November.

Geoffrey Charles Tasker Keyes was born on 18 May 1917 in Aberdour, Scotland. His father was Rear-Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, later Admiral of the Fleet Lord Keyes, who found fame the following year when he drew up a plan to block the seaward ends of the Bruges ship canal at Zeebrugge and Ostend. Admiral Keyes led the Zeebrugge Raid on St George's Day, 1918, with great success and achieved his objective.

Young Geoffrey Keyes grew up with the hope of following

# Geoffrey Keyes, VC

JOHN DEVONPORT

Paintings by DOUGLAS ANDERSON

THE YOUNGEST Colonel in the British Army, Geoffrey Keyes won immortal fame for the daring but ill-fated raid on Rommel's rear headquarters in November 1941, the German General himself paying tribute to his courage.

his father into the Navy but his eyesight let him down and he failed the stiff medical. So, following his education at Eton, he went to Sandhurst rather than Dartmouth. Being an enthusiastic rider he went hunting whenever possible, and applied to join his uncle's regiment, the Royal Scots Greys, in 1937.

He saw service in Palestine and at the outbreak of war volunteered for special service. With his ability to ski, in April 1940, he joined the Narvik Expeditionary Force in Norway, attached to the 49th Division. After a vain attempt to hold Narvik the expedition was evacuated back to England where Keyes rejoined his regiment. He was awarded the Croix de Guerre by the Chasseurs Alpin for his service in the campaign.

Soon afterwards he volunteered for the newly formed Commando organisation, and was posted to the 11th Scottish Commando. He found himself the most senior Regular there after many of the volunteers were 'returned to their units', and was appointed second-in-command with the rank of Acting Major.

The 11th Scottish went into action for the first time in Syria in June 1941, fighting against the Vichy French. It was during this campaign that Major Keyes won the Military Cross. His

commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Pedder, was killed so at the tender age of 24 Keyes found himself in command, with the acting rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. Of the 395 Commandos who landed in Syria, 104 were casualties when they withdrew.

After Colonel Keyes' 'idea' was accepted, plans for the operation against Rommel's rear headquarters were put into effect. The preliminary intelligence on which the plan was based had been gathered by a Captain Haselden, a British officer attached to the Libyan Arab Force, who spoke fluent Arabic. (Haselden met his death on 7 August 1943, when commanding a suicidal raiding party in German-held Tobruk.)

When the plans were submitted to Colonel Laycock, Commander of the Middle East Commandos, he gave it as his considered opinion '... that the chance of being evacuated after the operation were very slender, and that the attack on General Rommel's HQ in particular appeared to be desperate in the extreme. This attack, even if initially successful, meant almost certain death for those who took part in it.'

Colonel Keyes thereupon begged him to keep this opinion to himself and not repeat it, in case the operation was cancelled. In spite of his well-founded misgivings, Colonel

The front door of Rommel's headquarters.







The cave in the ravine where the party hid.

Laycock was determined to go along too — as observer — proposing to remain at the landing place.

The training was now intensified, and included practice with rubber dinghies and folding boats. On 10 November the Commandos boarded the submarines *Torbay* and *Talisman*. Two days out, Keyes in *Torbay* and Laycock in *Talisman* explained the plan to the men: they were out to 'get Rommel'.

The commander of *Torbay* was Anthony Miers who later won the Victoria Cross for sinking two supply ships in Corfu harbour. The writer became acquainted with Rear-Admiral Sir A.C.C. Miers before his death in 1985 and during a discussion with him about the raid he told me that Colonel Keyes was a very brave man to attempt such an operation which never had any chance of succeeding. ...

On Thursday 13 November, the submarines arrived off the chosen beach on the north coast of Africa. The weather conditions were very rough and unpleasant but it was thought imperative that the Commandos should disembark that night. *Torbay* closed in near the beach, leaving *Talisman* to keep watch seaward.

Captain Haselden, disguised as an Arab, had left Cairo three weeks before and he now stood at the beach flashing the agreed signal. The weather continued to worsen and after many attempts all the Commandos from the *Torbay* reached the shore. It says much for the determination and good seamanship of all concerned that none of the laden men were swept away and drowned.

By the time *Talisman* moved into position to unload the second party the operation was three hours overschedule and the submarine was in danger of being exposed at moonrise.

When the *Talisman* was compelled to withdraw, only a handful of men had reached the beach, leaving 18 Commandos aboard and six drowned after standing on the casing of the submarine when a heavy swell swept them overboard.

Colonel Keyes was now left with only three officers and twenty men, less than half his original force. After consulting with Colonel Laycock, who had managed to land from *Talisman*, Keyes was compelled to modify his plan. Instead of having four detachments to attack separate objectives simultaneously, he split his men into two detachments. The main force of 18 men was to go with him to the primary objective, Rommel's HQ, while a small party under Lieutenant Cooke would sabotage communications by blowing up a steel telegraph pylon.

Captain Haselden assigned his two Arab guides to lead the raiding party to the village of Sidi Rafa, also known as Beda Littoria, which housed the German HQ. He himself went off to carry out his own part of the revised plan: to destroy communications on the road between El Faidia and Slonta. He later rejoined his Long Range Desert Group.

In the morning the men disappeared into the scrub and spent the day cleaning their weapons. They finally moved out at 8pm that night, leaving Colonel Laycock with a beach party of four men to guard the stores and keep in touch with *Torbay*. The *Talisman* returned to Alexandria with the 18 Commandos left on board.

The plan was to march to the objective at night and rest during the day. On the third night they reached the cave where they planned to stay before setting out on the last stage on the evening of 17/18 November. The heavens opened again and

a thunderstorm began with torrential rain. The men's spirits sank at the prospect of a long, wet and muddy march before starting a hazardous operation. Colonel Keyes spent the time encouraging them by saying that the foul weather was a blessing in disguise. Their approach would be unheard in the wind and rain and the guards might be taking shelter.

They moved off at 6pm with blackened faces and all the insignia removed from their uniforms. At the outskirts of Sidi Rafa it was found that one of the guides had slipped away and the other refused to go on until Colonel Keyes threatened to shoot him unless he showed him which was Rommel's HQ. Reluctantly, he moved on into the rain-swept village whereupon he pointed out the six-storied stone building surrounded by a barbed-wire fence. After allowing the Arab to leave with the promise of payment later, Colonel Keyes



Sergeant Terry.

went forward with Sergeant Terry to make a preliminary reconnaissance of the building while Captain Campbell formed up the rest of the party by one of the outbuildings, for it was still raining heavily.

One of the men tripped over a tin can and roused a dog,

which began to bark furiously. An Italian and an Arab officer emerged from a hut and approached them, asking who they were. Captain Campbell replied in German and told them they were a German patrol and to shut the dog up. They did as they were told and returned to their hut, apparently satisfied.

At that moment, Colonel Keyes and Sergeant Terry returned. He detailed three men to deal with a big bell-tent in the grounds used by the Germans as a guardroom. He personally led the three men to the tent, cutting a wire fence on the way, but the tent was found to be empty: the guards had evidently gone into the HQ out of the rain, leaving just one sentry standing in the entrance to the drive. Colonel Keyes crept forward alone and shot the guard in unison with a thunder-clap to cover the sound. The three Commandos were then ordered to watch the back door of the house and fire on anyone who came out.

When Colonel Keyes returned to the main party he formed them up for the assault. Keyes sent the men to the posts he had previously given them. They had brought with them enough high explosive to destroy the headquarters and the electric relay plant nearby, but it was feared that the rain may have rendered it useless.

Colonel Keyes had chosen himself to lead the assault on the HQ. He took with him Captain Campbell, Sergeant Terry and three NCOs — all that could be spared when the men for the other jobs were detailed off. It was now just before midnight as Colonel Keyes tried the doors and windows and found them to be locked. There was no other alternative but to enter the house by using the front door which was set back inside a porch, at the top of a flight of stone steps. Colonel Keyes ran

Rommel's headquarters seen from the grain tower, showing the back door and enclosure with the Carabinieri barracks beyond.





up the steps carrying a Colt .45 automatic. Captain Campbell knocked on the door, demanding in German to be let in. The door was opened onto a second pair of glass doors by a German soldier in a steel helmet and overcoat. Keyes at once closed with him, covering him with his Colt. The German seized the muzzle of Keyes' revolver and tried to wrestle it from him. The man then took hold of Keyes, who was only slightly built, and backed into a position with his back to the wall and his either side protected by both sets of doors. He then started to shout for help. None of the other Commandos could get at him with a knife so Captain Campbell shot him with a .38 revolver which he thought would make less noise than the Colt. When the German fell Colonel Keyes realised his arm had gone numb. Ignoring his disability, he presumed that the shot had been heard so he gave the order to use the sub-machine guns and grenades.

They now found themselves in a large hall with a stone stairway leading to the upper stories on the right. There were several doors leading out of it, one on the right of the entrance, and two down the left-hand wall, while on the far side glass doors led to the back premises. Sergeant Terry saw the farthest door on the left open a little way — a gleam of light shone out for a second before it hurriedly shut again. They heard a man in heavy boots clattering down the stairs, shouting, 'What goes on there?'

As he came to the turn in the stairs his feet came in sight and Sergeant Terry fired a burst with his SMG. The man turned and fled back upstairs. In the garden, one of the Commandos saw the light of a torch coming through the dark towards him. He waited until the man, who was in pyjamas but armed, was within a few yards then shot him dead.

Back in the house, Colonel Keyes had been flinging open the doors on either side of the hall. He looked inside and found the rooms empty. He pointed to a light shining through the crack under the next door and opened it to find inside were about ten Germans with steel helmets. He fired two or three rounds into the room with his Colt. Captain Campbell shouted, 'Wait, I'll throw a grenade in'.

Keyes slammed the door shut and held it while Campbell pulled the pin out of the grenade. When he was ready,

Keyes opened the door again while Campbell threw in the grenade and Sergeant Terry took the opportunity to fire a burst from his sub-machine gun. Colonel Keyes said, 'Well done', as he saw the grenade go in, but before he could close the door a German fired a single shot which struck Colonel Keyes just over his heart. He fell unconscious at the feet of Campbell and Terry, his Colt clattering to the floor. Campbell shut the door and he and Terry flung themselves to one side as the grenade went off with a shattering explosion. At this point, Captain Campbell decided to move Colonel Keyes out of the house, so he and Sergeant Terry carried him outside and laid him on the grass verge, where he was found to be dead.

When they realized they could do no more for their Colonel, the two men went back inside the house to continue the raid. In the confusion that followed, Captain Campbell went round to the back of the house to check on the sentries and was instantly shot in the leg by one of the Commandos who had orders to treat everyone from that direction as an enemy. His leg was broken by the shot and later it was amputated. This now left the party without officers and all the zest of the operation had gone.

Captain Campbell ordered Sergeant Terry to leave him and retreat after placing the explosive charges. The Sergeant did as he was told then left enough explosives to kill everyone in the house, but as feared the rain had ruined the fuzes and they failed to go off. Two of the Commandos pushed all their charges down a breather pipe of the power-house, followed by a grenade.

The charge exploded and all the lights went out.

Sergeant Terry blew his whistle and gathered as many men as he could find and pulled out, throwing grenades through windows and leaving time-bombs as they went. The young Sergeant, who was only 19, showed exemplary leadership by guiding the party safely back across wild and broken country, previously traversed only in the dark, to Colonel Laycock on the beach.

Due to the lack of signallers able to communicate in morse with Torbay that night, the evacuation was postponed until the following evening. But next day the Commandos were attacked by Italian and Arab forces who captured or killed many of them. Several escaped but were later captured except for Colonel Laycock and Sergeant Terry who, after spending 40 days and nights wandering in the Jebel, were found by the advancing British troops.

General Rommel never lived at the German rear headquarters, as he had his own villa in Beda Littoria. On the night of the raid he was living in a house near Gambud. When he heard of the attack on his HQ so far behind German lines, he found the time to send his own personal chaplain to conduct the funeral of Colonel Keyes and the four German soldiers who were killed. They were buried in a small cemetery outside the village, with full military honours. A solid wooden cross with Colonel Keyes' name and rank, thought by the Germans to be that of Major, was placed over his grave. The cross is now in the family's local church in Tingewick, Buckinghamshire.

Some may say little was

**Douglas Anderson's reconstructions on the back cover show, left: The newly commissioned Subaltern Geoffrey Keyes in the full dress uniform of the Royal Scots Greys as he appeared at a levée in 1937. Right: Lieutenant-Colonel Geoffrey Keyes, MC, in North Africa shortly before the raid on Rommel's rear headquarters. At the time he was the youngest Colonel in the British Army, and had grown a moustache to make himself look older.**

accomplished in a raid which failed to achieve its stated purpose — to 'get Rommel' — but in England the news of the raid broke at a time when morale was low and it gave everybody a great lift. The War Office wanted to disband the Commandos, but found it was impossible now that they were no longer a secret. The Keyes raid was followed by many more, including the kidnapping of a German General from Crete and his removal by submarine. The raid did achieve absolute surprise on the Germans who only managed one shot during the operation, and that was the shot that killed Colonel Keyes.

For leading the raid, Lieutenant-Colonel Geoffrey Keyes was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross and Sir Winston Churchill later comforted Admiral Keyes by saying, 'I would far rather have Geoffrey alive than Rommel dead'. **MI**

With grateful thanks and acknowledgements to the Hon Elizabeth Keyes, sister of Geoffrey and author of *Geoffrey Keyes V.C. of the Rommel Raid*, published 1956.

*The gun carriage carrying the coffins of four German soldiers alongside that of Geoffrey Keyes.*





# Geoffrey Keyes



Subaltern, 1937



Lieutenant-Colonel, 1941

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